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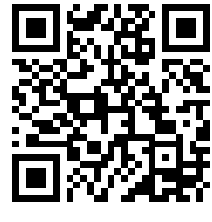

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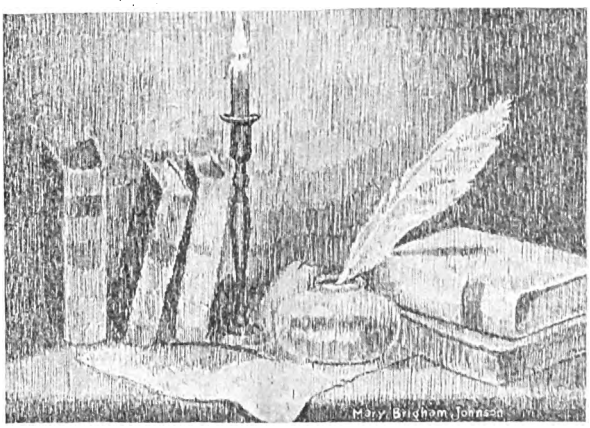

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THE

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The STRAND MAGAZINE

JULY, 1928.

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WHIPPING OFF HIS HAT AND UTTERING A HOARSE CRY, THE GLASSY-EYED MAN LEANED FORWARD AND SMACKED AT THE MOUSE.

(See page 13.)

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The Passing of Ambrose

By

P. G. WODEHOUSE

Illustrated by
TREYER EVANS

"RIGHT-HO," said Algy Crufts. "Then I shall go alone."

"Right-ho," said Ambrose Wiffin. "Go alone."

"Right-ho," said Algy Crufts. "I will."

"Right-ho," said Ambrose Wiffin. "Do."

"Right-ho, then," said Algy Crufts.

"Right-ho," said Ambrose Wiffin.

"Right-ho," said Algy Crufts.

Few things are more painful than an altercation between two boyhood friends. Nevertheless, when these occur, the conscientious historian must record them.

It is also, no doubt, the duty of the historian to be impartial. In the present instance, however, it would be impossible to avoid bias. To realize that Algy Crufts was perfectly justified in taking an even stronger tone, one has only to learn the facts. It was the season of the year when there comes upon all right-thinking young men the urge to buzz off to Monte Carlo; and the scheme had been that he and Ambrose should edge into the ten o'clock boat-train on the morning of the sixteenth of February. All the arrangements had been made—the tickets (*billets*) bought; the trunks packed; the "One Hundred Systems of Winning at Roulette" studied from end to end; and here was Ambrose, on the afternoon of February the fourteenth, oiling in and saying that he proposed to remain in London for another fortnight.

Algy Crufts eyed him narrowly. Ambrose Wiffin was always a nattily-dressed young man, but to-day there had crept into his outer crust a sort of sinister effulgence which could have but one meaning. It shouted from his white carnation; it shrieked from his lemon-coloured spats; and Algy read it in a flash.

"You're messing about after some beastly female," he said.

Ambrose Wiffin reddened and brushed his top-hat the wrong way.

"And I know who it is. It's that Wickham girl."

Ambrose reddened again, and brushed his top-hat once more—this time the right way, restoring the *status quo*.

"Well," he said, "you introduced me to her."

"I know I did. And, if you recollect, I drew you aside immediately afterwards and warned you to watch your step."

"If you have anything to say against Miss Wickham——"

"I haven't anything to say against her. She's one of my best pals. I've known young Bobbie Wickham since she was a kid in arms, and I'm what you might call immune where she's concerned. But you can take it from me that every other fellow who comes in contact with Bobbie finds himself sooner or later up to the Adam's apple in some ghastly mess. She lets them down with a dull, sickening thud. Look at Roland Attwater. He went to stay at her place, and he had a snake with him——"

"Why?"

"I don't know. He happened to have a snake with him, and Bobbie put it in a fellow's bed and let everyone think it was

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Attwater who had done it. He had to leave by the milk-train at three in the morning."

"Attwater had no business lugging snakes about with him to country houses," said Ambrose, primly. "One can readily understand how a high-spirited girl would feel tempted——"

"And then there was Dudley Finch. She asked him down for the night and forgot to tell her mother he was coming, with the result that he was taken for a Society burglar and got shot in the leg by the butler as he was leaving to catch the milk-train."

A look such as Sir Galahad might have worn on hearing gossip about Queen Guinevere lent a noble dignity to Ambrose Wiffin's pink young face.

"I don't care," he said, stoutly. "She's the sweetest girl on earth, and I'm taking her to the Dog Show on Saturday."

"Eh? What about our Monte Carlo binge?"

"That'll have to be postponed. Not for long. She's up in London, staying with an aunt of sorts, for another couple of weeks. I could come after that."

"Do you mean to say you have the immortal crust to expect me to hang about for two weeks, waiting for you?"

"I don't see why not."

"Oh, don't you? Well, I'm jolly well not going to."

"Right-ho. Just as you like."

"Right-ho. Then I shall go alone."

"Right-ho. Go alone."

"Right-ho. I will."

"Right-ho. Do."

"Right-ho, then."

"Right-ho," said Ambrose Wiffin.

"Right-ho," said Algy Crufts.

AT almost exactly the moment when this very distressing scene was taking place at the Drones Club in Dover Street, Roberta Wickham, in the drawing-room of her aunt Marcia's house in Eaton Square, was endeavouring to reason with her mother and finding the going a bit sticky. Lady Wickham was notoriously a difficult person to reason with. She was a woman who knew her mind.

"But, mother!"

Lady Wickham advanced her forceful chin another inch. She had rather prominent features and, in addition, an eye like Mars to threaten and command.

"It's no use arguing, Roberta——"

"But, mother! I keep telling you. Jane Falconer has just rung up and wants me to go round and help her choose the cushions for her new flat."

"And I keep telling you that a promise is a promise. You voluntarily offered after breakfast this morning to take your cousin Wilfred and his little friend Esmond Bates to the moving-pictures to-day, and you cannot disappoint them now."

"But if Jane's left to herself she'll choose the most awful things."

"I cannot help that."

"She's relying on me. She said so. And I swore I'd go."

"I cannot help that."

"I'd forgotten all about Wilfred."

"I cannot help that. You should not have forgotten. You must ring your friend up and tell her that you are unable to see her this afternoon. I think you ought to be glad of the chance of giving pleasure to these two boys. One ought not always to be thinking of oneself. One ought to try to bring a little sunshine into the lives of others. I will go and tell Wilfred you are waiting for him."

Left alone, the girl wandered morosely to the window and stood looking down into the Square. The faint light of the February afternoon gleamed on her striking red hair, but there was no accompanying gleam in her hazel eyes. Her aspect was that of a girl who is fed to the teeth. From where she stood she was able to observe a small boy in an Eton suit sedulously hopping from the pavement to the bottom step of the house and back again. This was Esmond Bates, next-door's son and heir, and the effect the sight of him had on Bobbie was to drive her from the window and send her slumping on to the sofa, where for a space she sat, gazing before her and disliking life. It may not seem to everybody the summit of human pleasure to go about London choosing cushions, but Bobbie had set her heart on it; and the iron was entering deeply into her soul when the door opened and the butler appeared.

"Mr. Wiffin," announced the butler. And Ambrose walked in, glowing with that holy, reverential emotion which always surged over him at the sight of Bobbie.

Usually there was blended with this a certain diffidence, unavoidable in one visiting the shrine of a goddess; but to-day the girl seemed so unaffectedly glad to see him that diffidence vanished. He was amazed to note how glad she was to see him. She had bounded from the sofa on his entry, and now was looking at him with shining eyes like a shipwrecked mariner who sights a sail.

"Oh, Ambrose!" said Bobbie. "I'm so glad you came."

Ambrose thrilled from his quiet but effective sock-clocks to his Stacombed hair. How wise, he felt, he had been to spend that long hour perfecting the minutest details of his toilet. As a glance in the mirror on the landing had just assured him, his hat

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was right, his coat was right, his trousers were right, his shoes were right, his buttonhole was right, and his tie was right. He was one hundred per cent., and girls appreciate such things.

" Just thought I'd look in," he said, speaking in the guttural tones which agitated vocal cords always forced upon him when addressing the queen of her species, " and see if you were doing anything this afternoon. If," he added, " you see what I mean."

" I'm taking my cousin Wilfred and a little friend of his to the movies. Would you like to come ? "

" I say ! Thanks awfully ! May I ? "

" Yes, do."

" I say ! Thanks awfully ! " He gazed at her with worshipping admiration. " But, I say, how frightfully kind of you to mess up an afternoon taking a couple of kids to the movies. Awfully kind. I mean kind. I mean I call it dashed kind of you."

" Oh, well ! " said Bobbie, modestly. " I think I ought to be glad of the chance of giving pleasure to these two boys. One ought not always to be thinking of oneself. One ought to try to bring a little sunshine into the lives of others."

" You're an angel ! "

" No, no."

" An absolute angel," insisted Ambrose, quivering fervently. " Doing a thing like this is—well, absolutely angelic. If you follow me. I wish Algy Crufts had been here to see it."

" Why Algy ? "

" Because he was saying some very unpleasant things about you this afternoon. Most unpleasant things."

" What did he say ? "

" He said——" Ambrose winced. The vile words were choking him. " He said you let people down."

" Did he ? Did he, forsooth ? I'll have to have a word with young Algernon P. Crufts. He's getting above himself. He seems to forget," said Bobbie, a dreamy look coming into her beautiful eyes, " that we live next to each other in the country and that I know which his room is. What young Algy wants is a frog in his bed."

" Two frogs," amended Ambrose.

" Two frogs," agreed Bobbie.

The door opened and there appeared on the mat a small boy. He wore an Eton suit, spectacles, and, low down over his prominent ears, a bowler hat ; and Ambrose thought he had seldom seen anything fouler. He would have looked askance at Royalty itself, had Royalty interrupted a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Wickham.

" I'm ready," said the boy.

" This is Aunt Marcia's son Wilfred," said Bobbie.

" Oh ? " said Ambrose, coldly.

Like so many young men, Ambrose Wiffin was accustomed to regard small boys with a slightly jaundiced eye. It was his simple creed that they wanted their heads smacked. When not having their heads smacked, they should be out of the picture altogether. He stared disparagingly at this specimen. A half-formed resolve to love him for Bobbie's sake perished at birth. Only the thought that Bobbie would be of the company enabled him to endure the prospect of being seen in public with this outstanding piece of cheese.

" Let's go," said the boy.

" All right," said Bobbie. " I'm ready."

" We'll find Old Stinker on the steps," the boy assured her, as one promising a deserving person some delightful treat.

OLD STINKER, discovered as predicted, seemed to Ambrose just the sort of boy who would be a friend of Bobbie's cousin Wilfred. He was goggle-eyed and freckled, and also, as it was speedily to appear, an officious little devil who needed six of the best with a fives-bat.

" The cab's waiting," said Old Stinker.

" How clever of you to have found a cab, Esmond," said Bobbie, indulgently.

" I didn't find it. It's his cab. I told it to wait."

A stifled exclamation escaped Ambrose, and he shot a fevered glance at the taxi's clock. The sight of the figures on it caused him a sharp pang. Not six with a fives-bat, he felt. Ten. And of the juiciest.

" Splendid," said Bobbie. " Hop in. Tell him to drive to the Tivoli."

Ambrose suppressed the words he had been about to utter, and, climbing into the cab, settled himself down and devoted his attention to trying to avoid the feet of Bobbie's cousin Wilfred, who sat opposite him. The boy seemed as liberally equipped with these as a centipede, and there was scarcely a moment when his boots were not rubbing the polish off Ambrose's glittering shoes. It was with something of the emotions of the Ten Thousand Greeks on beholding the sea that at long last he sighted the familiar architecture of the Strand. Soon he would be sitting next to Bobbie in a dimly-lighted auditorium, and a man with that in prospect could afford to rough it a bit on the journey. He alighted from the cab and plunged into the queue before the box-office.

Wedged in among the crowd of pleasure-seekers, Ambrose, though physically uncomfortable, felt somehow a sort of spiritual refreshment. There is nothing a young man

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in love finds more delightful than the doing of some knightly service for the loved one; and though to describe as a knightly service the act of standing in a queue and buying tickets for a motion-picture entertainment may seem to the more hard-boiled of the reading public straining the facts a little, to one in Ambrose's condition a service is a service. He would have preferred to be called upon to save Bobbie's life; but, this not being at the moment feasible, it was something to be jostling in a queue for her sake.

Nor was the action so free from peril as might appear at first sight. Sheer, black disaster was lying in wait for Ambrose Wiffin. He had just forced his way to the pay-box and was turning to leave after buying the tickets when the thing happened. From somewhere behind him an arm shot out, there was an instant's sickening suspense, and then the top-hat which he loved nearly as much as life itself was rolling across the lobby with a stout man in the uniform of a Czecho-Slovakian Rear-Admiral in pursuit.

In the sharp agony of this happening, it had seemed to Ambrose that he had experienced the worst moment of his career. Then he discovered that it was in reality the worst but one. The sorrow's crown of sorrow was achieved an instant later when the Admiral returned, bearing in his hand a battered something which for a space he was unable to recognize.

The Admiral was sympathetic. There was a bluff, sailorly sympathy in his voice as he spoke.

"Here you are, sir," he said. "Here's your rat. A little the worse for wear, this sat is, I'm afraid, sir. A gentleman happened to step on it. You can't step on a nat," he said, sententiously, "not without hurting it. That tat is not the yat it was."

Although he spoke in the easy manner of one making genial conversation, his voice had in it a certain purposeful note. He seemed like a Rear-Admiral who was waiting for something; and Ambrose, as if urged by some hypnotic spell, produced half a crown and pressed it into his hand. Then, placing the remains on his head, he tottered across the lobby to join the girl he loved.

That she could ever, after seeing him in a hat like that, come to love him in return seemed to him at first unbelievable. Then Hope began to steal shyly back. After all, it was in her cause that he had suffered this great blow. She would take that into account. Furthermore, girls of Roberta Wickham's fine fibre do not love a man entirely for his hat. The trousers count, so do the spats. It was in a spirit almost optimistic that he forced his way through the crowd to the spot where he had left the girl. And as he reached it

"I'm ready," said the boy.

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the squeaky voice of Old Stinker smote his ear.

"Golly!" said Old Stinker. "What have you done to your hat?"

Another squeaky voice spoke. Aunt Marcia's son Wilfred was regarding him with the offensive interest of a biologist examining some lower organism under the microscope.

"I say," said Wilfred, "I don't know if you know it, but somebody's been sitting on your hat, or something. Did you ever see a hat like that, Stinker?"

"Never in my puff," replied his friend.

Ambrose gritted his teeth.

"This is Aunt Marcia's son Wilfred," said Bobbie.
"Oh?" said Ambrose, coldly.

"Never mind my hat! Where's Miss Wickham?"

"Oh, she had to go," said Old Stinker.

It was not for a moment that the hideous meaning of the words really penetrated

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Ambrose's consciousness. Then his jaw fell and he stared aghast.

"Go? Go where?"

"I don't know where. She went."

"She said she had just remembered an appointment," explained Wilfred. "She said——"

"——that you were to take us in and she would join us later if she could."

"She rather thought she wouldn't be able to, but she said leave her ticket at the box-office in case."

"She said she knew we would be all right with you," concluded Old Stinker. "Come on, let's beef in or we'll be missing the educational two-reel comic."

Ambrose eyed them wanly. All his instincts urged him to smack these two heads as heads should be smacked, to curse a good deal, to wash his hands of the whole business and stride away. But Love conquers all. Reason told him that here were two small boys, a good deal ghastlier than any small boy he had yet encountered. In short, mere smack-fodder. But Love, stronger than Reason, whispered that they were a sacred trust. Roberta Wickham expected him to take them to the movies and he must do it.

And such was his great love that not yet had he begun to feel any resentment at this desertion of hers. No doubt, he told himself, she had had some good reason. In anyone a shade less divine, the act of sneaking off and landing him with these two disease-germs might have seemed culpable; but what he felt at the moment was that the Queen could do no wrong.

"Oh, all right," he said, dully. "Push in."

Old Stinker had not yet exhausted the theme of the hat.

"I say," he observed, "that hat looks pretty rummy, you know."

"Absolutely weird," assented Wilfred.

Ambrose regarded them intently for a moment, and his gloved hand twitched a little. But the iron self-control of the Wiffins stood him in good stead.

"Push in," he said in a strained voice. "Push in."

IN the last analysis, however many highly-salaried stars its cast may contain, and however superb and luxurious the settings of its orgy-scenes, the success of a super-film's appeal to an audience must always depend on what company each unit of that audience is in when he sees it. Start wrong in the vestibule, and entertainment in the true sense is out of the question.

For the picture which the management of the Tivoli was now presenting to its patrons Hollywood had done all that Art and Money could effect. Based on Wordsworth's well-known poem, "We are Seven," it was entitled "Where Passion Lurks," and offered such notable favourites of the silver screen as Laurette Byng, G. Cecil Terwilliger, Baby Bella, Oscar the Wonder-Poodle, and Professor Pond's Educated Sea-Lions. And yet it left Ambrose cold.

If only Bobbie had been at his side, how different it all would have been. As it was, the beauty of the story had no power to soothe him, nor could he get the slightest thrill out of the Babylonian Banquet scene, which had cost five hundred thousand dollars. From start to finish he sat in a dull apathy; then, at last, the ordeal over, he stumbled out into daylight and the open air. Like G. Cecil Terwilliger at a poignant crisis in the fourth reel, he was as one on whom Life has forced its bitter cup and who has drained it to the lees.

And it was this moment, when a strong man stood face to face with his soul, that Old Stinker with the rashness of Youth selected for beginning again about the hat.

"I say," said Old Stinker, as they came out into the bustling Strand, "you've no idea what an ass you look in that napper."

"Priceless," agreed Wilfred, cordially. "A perfect mess."

"All you want is a banjo and you could make a fortune singing comic songs outside the pubs."

On his first introduction to these little fellows it had seemed to Ambrose that they had touched the lowest possible level to which humanity can descend. It now became apparent that there were hitherto unimagined depths which it was in their power to plumb. There is a point beyond which even a Wiffin's self-control fails to function. The next moment, above the roar of London's traffic there sounded the crisp note of a well-smacked head.

It was Wilfred who, being nearest, had received the treatment; and it was at Wilfred that an elderly lady, pausing, pointed with indignant horror in every waggle of her finger-tip.

"Why did you strike that little boy?" demanded the elderly lady.

Ambrose made no answer. He was in no mood for riddles. Besides, to reply fully to the question he would have been obliged to trace the whole history of his love, to dilate on the agony it had caused him to discover that his goddess had feet of clay, to explain how little by little through the recent entertainment there had grown a fever in his blood, caused by this boy sucking peppermints, shuffling his feet, giggling, and reading out the sub-titles. Lastly, he would have had to discuss at length the matter of the hat.

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Unequal to these things, he merely glowered; and such was the calibre of his scowl that the other supposed that here was the authentic Abysmal Brute.

"I've a good mind to call a policeman," she said.

It is a peculiar phenomenon of life in London that the magic word "policeman" has only to be whispered in any of its thoroughfares to attract a crowd of substantial dimensions; and Ambrose, gazing about him, now discovered that their little group had been augmented by some thirty citizens, each of whom was regarding him in much the same way that he would have regarded the accused in a big murder-trial at the Old Bailey.

A passionate desire to be elsewhere came upon the young man. Of all things in this life he disliked most a scene; and this was plainly working up into a scene of the worst kind. Seizing his sacred trusts by the elbow, he ran them across the street. The crowd continued to stand and stare at the spot where the incident had occurred.

FOR some little time, safe on the opposite pavement, Ambrose was too busily occupied in reassembling his disintegrated nervous system to give any attention to the world about him. He was recalled to mundane matters by a piercing squeal of ecstasy from his young companions.

"Oo! Oysters!"

"Golly! Oysters!"

And he became aware that they were standing outside a restaurant whose window was deeply paved with these shellfish. On these the two lads were gloating with bulging eyes.

"You can't step on a nat," the Admiral said, sententiously, "not without hurting it. That tat is not the yat it was."

"I could do with an oyster!" said Old Stinker.

"So could I jolly well do with an oyster," said Wilfred.

"I bet I could eat more oysters than you."

"I bet you couldn't."

"I bet I could."

"I bet you couldn't."

"I bet you a million pounds I could."

"I bet you a million trillion pounds you couldn't."

Ambrose had had no intention of presiding over the hideous sporting contest which they appeared to be planning. Apart from the nauseous idea of devouring oysters at half-past four in the afternoon, he resented the notion of spending any more of his money on these gargoyles. But at this juncture he observed, threading her way nimbly through the traffic, the elderly lady

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who had made the scene. A Number 33 omnibus could quite easily have got her, but by sheer carelessness failed to do so; and now she was on the pavement and heading in their direction. There was not an instant to be lost.

"Push in," he said, hoarsely. "Push in."

A moment later they were seated at a table and a waiter who looked like one of the executive staff of the Black Hand was hovering beside them with pencil and pad.

Ambrose made one last appeal to his guests' better feelings.

"You can't really want oysters at this time of day," he said, almost pleadingly.

"I bet you we can," said Old Stinker.

"I bet you a billion pounds we can," said Wilfred.

"Oh, all right," said Ambrose. "Oysters."

He sank back in his chair and endeavoured to avert his eyes from the grim proceedings. Æons passed, and he was aware that the golluping noises at his side had ceased. All things end in time. Even the weariest river winds somewhere to the sea. Wilfred and Old Stinker had stopped eating oysters.

"Finished?" he asked in a cold voice.

There was a moment's pause. The boys seemed hesitant.

"Yes, if there aren't any more."

"There aren't," said Ambrose. He beckoned to the waiter, who was leaning against the wall dreaming of old, happy murders of his distant youth. "L'addition," he said, curtly.

"Sare?"

"The bill."

"The pill? Oh, yes, sare."

Shrill and jovial laughter greeted the word.

"He said 'pill'!" gurgled Old Stinker.

"'Pill'!" echoed Wilfred.

They punched each other distractedly to signify their appreciation of this excellent comedy. The waiter, flushing darkly, muttered something in his native tongue and seemed about to reach for his stiletto. Ambrose reddened to the eyebrows. Laughing at waiters was simply one of the things that aren't done, and he felt his position acutely. It was a relief when the Black Hander returned with his change.

There was only a solitary sixpence on the plate, and Ambrose hastened to dip in his pocket for further coins to supplement this. A handsome tip would, he reasoned, show the waiter that, though circumstances had forced these two giggling outcasts upon him, spiritually he had no affiliation with them. It would be a gesture which would put him at once on an altogether different plane. The man would understand that, dubious though the company might be in which he had met him, Ambrose Wiffin himself was all right and had a heart of gold. "Simpatico," he believed these Italians called it.

And then he jumped up, tingling as from an electric shock. From pocket to pocket his fingers flew and in each found only emptiness. The awful truth was clear. An afternoon spent in paying huge taxi-fares, buying seats for motion-picture performances, pressing half-crowns into the palms of Czecho-Slovakian Rear-Admirals, and filling small boys with oysters had left him a financial ruin. That sixpence was all he had to get these two blighted boys back to Eaton Square.

AMBROSE WIFFIN paused at the cross-roads. In all his life he had never left a waiter untipped. He had not supposed it could be done. He had looked upon the tipping of waiters as a natural process, impossible to evade, like breathing or leaving the bottom button of your waistcoat unfastened. Ghosts of bygone Wiffins—Wiffins who had scattered largess to the multitude in the Middle Ages, Wiffins who in Regency days had flung landlords purses of gold—seemed to crowd at his elbow, imploring the last of their line not to disgrace the family name. On the other hand, sixpence would just pay for bus-fares and remove from him the necessity of walking two miles through the streets of London in a squashed top-hat and in the society of Wilfred and Old Stinker.

If it had been Wilfred alone—or even Old Stinker alone—or if that hat did not look so extraordinarily like something off the stage of a low-class music-hall——

Ambrose Wiffin made the great decision. Pocketing the sixpence with one swift motion of the hand and breathing heavily through his nose, he made for the door.

"Come on!" he growled.

He could have betted on his little friends. They acted just as he had expected they would. No tact. No reticence. Not an effort towards handling the situation. Just two bright young children of Nature who said the first thing that came into their heads and who, he hoped, would wake up tomorrow morning with ptomaine-poisoning.

"I say!" It was Wilfred who gave tongue first of the pair, and his clear voice rang through the restaurant like a bugle. "You haven't tipped him!"

"I say!" Old Stinker chimed in, extraordinarily bell-like. "Dash it all, aren't you going to tip him?"

"You haven't tipped the waiter," said Wilfred, making his meaning clearer.

"The waiter," explained Old Stinker, clarifying the situation of its last trace of ambiguity. "You haven't tipped him!"

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"Come on!" said Ambrose. "Push out! Push out!"

A hundred dead Wiffins shrieked a ghostly shriek and covered their faces with their winding-sheets. A stunned waiter clutched his napkin to his breast. And Ambrose, with bowed head, shot out of the door like a conscience-stricken rabbit. In that supreme moment he even forgot that he was wearing a top-hat like a concertina. So true is it that the greater emotion swallows up the less.

Hitherto, when sitting back with closed eyes, it had always been the custom of Ambrose Wiffin to give himself up to holy thoughts about Bobbie. But now they refused to come. Plenty of thoughts, but not holy ones. It was as though the supply had petered out.

Too dashed bad of the girl, he meant, letting him in for a thing like this. Absolutely too dashed bad of her. And, mark you, she had intended from the very beginning, mind you, to let him in for it. Oh,

From pocket to pocket his fingers flew and in each found only emptiness.

A heaven-sent omnibus stopped before him in a traffic-block. He pushed his little charges in, and, as they charged in their gay, boyish way to the farther end of the vehicle, seated himself next to the door, as far away from them as possible. Then, removing the hat, he sat back and closed his eyes.

yes, she had. All that about suddenly remembering an appointment, he meant to say. Perfect rot. Wouldn't hold water for a second. She had never had the least intention of coming into that bally moving-picture place. Right from the start she had planned to lure him into the thing and then ooze off and land him with these septic

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kids, and what he meant was that it was too dashed bad of her.

Yes, the verdict might be severe, but he declined to mince his words. Too dashed bad. Not playing the game. A bit thick. In short—well, to put it in a nutshell, too dashed bad.

The omnibus rolled on. Ambrose opened his eyes in order to note progress. He was delighted to observe that they were already nearing Hyde Park Corner. At last he permitted himself to breathe freely. His martyrdom was practically over. Only a little longer now, only a few short minutes, and he would be able to deliver the two pestilences f.o.b. at their dens in Eaton Square, wash them out of his life for ever, return to the comfort and safety of his cosy rooms in the Albany, and there begin life anew.

The thought was heartening; and Ambrose, greatly restored, turned to sketching out in his mind the details of the drink which his man, under his own personal supervision, should mix for him immediately upon his return. As to this he was quite clear. Many men in his position—practically, you might say, saved at last from worse than death—would make it a stiff whisky-and-soda. But Ambrose, though he had no prejudice against whisky-and-soda, felt otherwise. It must be a cocktail. The cocktail of a lifetime. A cocktail that would ring down the ages, in which gin blended smoothly with Italian vermouth and the spot of old brandy nestled like a trusting child against the dash of absinthe. . . .

He sat up sharply. He stared. No, his eyes had not deceived him. At the far end of the omnibus Trouble was rearing its ugly head.

ON occasions of great disaster it is seldom that the spectator perceives instantly every detail of what is toward. The thing creeps upon him gradually, impinging itself upon his consciousness in progressive stages. All that the inhabitants of Pompeii, for example, observed in the early stages of that city's doom was probably a mere puff of smoke. "Ah!" they said, "a puff of smoke!" and let it go at that. So with Ambrose Wiffin in the case of which we are treating.

The first thing that attracted Ambrose's attention was the face of a man who had come in at the last stop and seated himself immediately opposite Old Stinker. It was an extraordinarily solemn face, spotty in parts and bathed in a rather remarkable crimson flush. The eyes, which were prominent, wore a fixed, far-away look. Ambrose had noted them as they passed him. They were round, glassy eyes. They were, briefly, the eyes of a man who has lunched.

In the casual way in which one examines one's fellow-passengers on an omnibus, Ambrose had allowed his gaze to flit from time to time to this person's face. For some minutes its expression had remained unaltered. The man might have been sitting for his photograph. But now into the eyes there was creeping a look almost of animation. The flush had begun to deepen. For some reason or other, it was plain, the machinery of the brain was starting to move once more.

Ambrose watched him idly. No premonition of doom came to him. He was simply mildly interested. And then, little by little, there crept upon him a faint sensation of discomfort.

The man's behaviour had now begun to be definitely peculiar. There was only one adjective to describe his manner, and that was the adjective odd. Slowly he had heaved himself up into a more rigid posture, and with his hands on his knees was bending slightly forward. His eyes had taken on a still glassier expression, and now with the glassiness was blended horror. Unmistakable horror. He was staring fixedly at some object directly in front of him.

It was a white mouse. Or, rather, at present merely the head of a white mouse. This head, protruding from the breast-pocket of Old Stinker's jacket, was moving slowly from side to side. Then, tiring of confinement, the entire mouse left the pocket, climbed down its proprietor's person until it reached his knee, and, having done a little washing and brushing-up, twitched its whiskers and looked across with benevolent pink eyes at the man opposite. The latter drew a sharp breath, swallowed, and moved his lips for a moment. It seemed to Ambrose that he was praying.

The glassy-eyed passenger was a man of resource. Possibly this sort of thing had happened to him before and he knew the procedure. He now closed his eyes, kept them closed for perhaps half a minute, then opened them again.

The mouse was still there.

It is at moments such as this that the best comes out in a man. You may impair it with a series of injudicious lunches, but you can never wholly destroy the spirit that has made Englishmen what they are. When the hour strikes, the old bulldog strain will show itself. Shakespeare noticed the same thing. His back against the wall, an Englishman, no matter how well he has lunched, will always sell his life dearly.

The glassy-eyed man, as he would have been the first to admit, had had just that couple over the eight which make all the difference, but he was a Briton. Whipping

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off his hat and uttering a hoarse cry—possibly, though the words could not be distinguished, that old, heart-stirring appeal to St. George which rang out over the fields of Agincourt and Crécy—he leaned forward and smacked at the mouse.

The mouse had seen it coming. It did the only possible thing. It side-stepped and, slipping to the floor, went into retreat there. And then from every side there arose the stricken cries of women in peril.

History, dealing with the affair, will raise its eyebrows at the conductor of the omnibus. He was patently inadequate. He pulled a cord, stopped the vehicle, and, advancing into the interior, said " 'Ere ! " Napoleon might just as well have said " 'Ere ! " at the Battle of Waterloo. Forces far beyond the control of mere words had been unchained. Old Stinker was kicking the glassy-eyed passenger's shin. The glassy-eyed man was protesting that he was a gentleman. Three women were endeavouring simultaneously to get through an exit planned by the omnibus's architect to accommodate but one traveller alone.

And then a massive, uniformed figure was in their midst.

" Wot's this ? "

Ambrose waited no longer. He had had sufficient. Edging round the new-comer, he dropped from the omnibus and with swift strides vanished into the darkness.

THE morning of February the fifteenth came murkily to London in a mantle of fog. It found Ambrose Wiffin breakfasting in bed. On the tray before him was a letter. Twenty-four hours ago the sight of that handwriting would have set his heart a-flutter beneath his orange pyjamas, but now he regarded it coldly. Physically he was in the pink, but he no longer loved. His heart was dead, he regarded the opposite sex as a wash-out, and letters from Bobbie Wickham could stir no chord.

He had already perused this letter, but now he took it up once more and, his lips curved in a bitter smile, ran his eyes over it again, noting some of its high spots.

" . . . very disappointed in you . . . cannot understand how you could have behaved in such an extraordinary way . . ."

Ha !

" . . . did think I could have trusted you to look after . . . And then you go and leave the poor little fellows alone in the middle of London . . . "

Oh, ha, ha !

" . . . Wilfred arrived home in charge of a policeman, and mother is furious. I don't think I have ever seen her so pre-War . . ."

Ambrose Wiffin threw the letter down and picked up the telephone.

" Hullo ! "

" Hullo ! "

" Algy ? "

" Yes. Who's that ? "

" Ambrose Wiffin."

" Oh ? What-ho ! "

" What-ho ! "

" I say," said Algy Crufts, " what became of you yesterday afternoon ? I kept trying to get you on the 'phone and you were out."

" Sorry," said Ambrose Wiffin. " I was taking a couple of kids to the movies."

" What on earth for ? "

" Oh, well, one likes to get the chance of giving a little pleasure to people, don't you know. One ought not always to be thinking of oneself. One ought to try to bring a little sunshine into the lives of others."

" I suppose," said Algy, sceptically, " that, as a matter of fact, young Bobbie Wickham was with you, too, and you held her bally hand all the time."

" Nothing of the kind," replied Ambrose Wiffin with dignity. " Miss Wickham was not among those present. What were you trying to get me on the 'phone about yesterday ? "

" To ask you not to be a chump and stay hanging about London in this beastly weather. Ambrose, old bird, you simply must come to-morrow."

" Algy, old cork, I was just going to ring you up to say I would."

" You were ? "

" Absolutely."

" Great work ! Sound egg ! Right-ho, then, I'll meet you under the clock at Victoria at half-past nine."

" Right-ho. I'll be there."

" Right-ho. Under the clock."

" Right-ho. The good old clock."

" Right-ho," said Algy Crufts.

" Right-ho," said Ambrose Wiffin.

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The Great West Raid

By

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Illustrated by
S. ABBEY

PHILIP BRETT sat up in bed with a sudden start. He turned on the electric light and glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes past four, and the telephone-bell by his side was ringing violently and insistently, with a weird note of alarm in its call through the darkness. He took off the receiver, and recognized with a thrill the Chief Inspector's voice, hoarse and agitated.

"That you, Brett?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get down to Warren's Stores as quick as you can. Matthew's about again. Bad business, I'm afraid."

"Coming right away, sir."

In a quarter of an hour Brett had picked up a stray taxi and was driven to Brompton Road. He found one of the side entrances of the great emporium open, and the moment he entered the place he realized the atmosphere of tragedy. There was indeed something sullenly dramatic in the strange scene: the vast room, with many of its show-cases covered with linen spreads, the shadowy spaces where the lights had not been turned on, the little groups of men talking in eager, subdued voices, the three bodies, crumpled up and grotesque upon the floor—two in their watchmen's uniform, dead, the third struggling to make a last statement to a sergeant kneeling on one side, whilst the doctor held his hand on the other. In the far corner, near an open door, through which came faint gleams of the approaching dawn, an inspector was seated with a telephone on a small table before him, barking out quick, imperative orders. The dying man, looking round, recognized the new-comer, and summoned him feebly. The doctor held a restorative to his lips, and, after a moment's gasping for breath, he gripped Brett's coat-sleeve feverishly.

"You're Scotland Yard, ain't you?" he said. "I know. Listen! There was only three of them doing the real work. The rest were just packing up and getting the stuff away. They all wore masks, but they were big men, and they moved—just like them dolls, as though they were on springs. I got mine just here, by that third show-case. He came round the corner sudden. 'Put 'em up!' he shouted. I suppose I'm wishing now that I had, but I didn't. I got him——"

The man's breath for a moment failed him. The doctor wiped his lips. He continued, a little more feebly:—

"I got him fairly in the mouth with my fist—thought he was going over, and then I'd have been on top of him. He just staggered back, and out came his gun, and that was the end of me."

"Did you see what the masks were made of, or notice any peculiarity about either of the burglars?" Brett asked.

The man shook his head feebly.

"They moved about like ghosts, sir. Rubber soles, black clothes, masks that fitted as though they'd been boiled on to 'em. They didn't disturb the lights. Their torches were all they wanted to see with. It was Jim who tumbled to what was going on first. We met down here at three o'clock as usual, and he see'd a white flame burning in the office where they were firing the safe, and directly afterwards we heard a rumble as the door fell open. He jumped, and started for the alarm—got within a foot of it, too, but with his hand all ready stretched

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out to bang the knob they shot him dead, and he went over—Jim did—like a sack of carrots. There he lies, yonder. Never moved again."

The man's eyes were half closed. There was a brief, ghastly silence. The doctor shook his head.

"It's about all over," he announced.

Brett leaned down a little closer.

"Don't talk any more," he whispered, kindly. "Are there any messages you'd like to send?"

The man opened his eyes again. It was only a thin thread of voice which came from his lips, but it was curiously distinct.

"The old woman's dead," he said. "Never thought I'd be thankful for it, but I am now. I've been in two burglaries—but I never see'd anything like this. There were seven bags full of jewellery from the floor upstairs. They just worked the lift, and brought them down as cool as you like—never hurried at all, never spoke—just like machines they were. As fast as they brought the stuff down there were men waiting in the yard, who took it over to the shed. They must have had a van there. Perhaps, after this," he concluded, his voice dying away, "they'll let us chaps carry a gun. Instead—shot down like sheep we was."

The last word or two had come lingeringly from the man's lips. The doctor bent over him and covered his face with his handkerchief. Brett scrambled to his feet. A lump had risen in his throat, but there was no time in those tense moments for regret or sentiment. He made his way to the corner where the watchman had struck the blow, and, with an electric torch in his hand, made a close search. There were a few drops of blood near the show-case, and, amongst the kicked-up dust where the masked man had staggered and recovered himself, a small white object, inset with a glittering morsel of metal—a man's front tooth which had been stopped, and the root of which was still red. He wrapped it carefully in a piece of tissue-paper and placed it in his pocket-book. Afterwards he continued his search, but without avail. There was no other memento of the encounter.

SIX o'clock struck, and a slow, unwilling daylight was bringing faint relief to the gloom of the streets outside. Police ambulances had arrived, and the bodies of the dead men were reverently removed. A crowd of curious loiterers in a side-street was continually being dispersed by the police. The managing director of the firm, Sir Thomas Callender, sleepy but agitated, arrived in his car from Richmond, and bustled into the small office where Chief Inspector Absolom and Brett were talking.

"A terrible business, this, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "Terrible! Is it true that three of the watchmen have been killed?"

"I'm afraid it is," the Chief Inspector admitted.

"And they've got away with a lot of stuff?"

"For the present, yes," was the regretful reply. "They've taken it off in one of your own vans, too, and a limousine. What we should like from you, sir, as soon as you can let us have it, is some idea as to the nature and quantity of the stolen goods."

"I'll have a look round," Sir Thomas proposed. "The heads of the jewellery department will be here by now."

He hurried off. The other two men walked slowly once more round the warehouses.

"I don't see that there's anything more we can do here," the Inspector remarked, thoughtfully. "Our finger-print experts are working on the show-cases, and Hovell has taken every possible photograph of the foot-prints in the dust. They've rifled seven safes, cleared out Lord knows how much jewellery, and they haven't left so much as a hand-file or a collar-stud behind them. Brett, you know whose work this is, of course?"

"Matthew's," his subordinate groaned.

The Inspector nodded.

"There's no other criminal out of prison," he declared, "who could possibly have organized an affair like this. The detail of it all is perfection. The Brompton Road police were never for a moment suspicious. The sergeant tells me now that he is sure that a crawling taxicab gave signals whenever the coast was clear so that they could get the bags across. When the van came out the man on point duty simply thought that someone was making an early move into the country. There might never have been an alarm at all if he hadn't noticed the three men in evening dress in the limousine following it. He thought that was queer, strolled round to the back door, which was properly locked, stood on a case, looked in through a window, and saw the bodies on the floor and the whole place in confusion. Brett, what was the last news you had of Matthew?"

"I saw him three nights ago, sir."

"Saw Matthew? Where?"

"Coming out of the Ambassadors Theatre. I had dined late at the Ivy. I go there occasionally, because from something I once heard I fancy that it used to be a favourite haunt of his. Afterwards I crossed the street to watch the people leaving the theatre. I always imagine,

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I don't exactly know why, that Matthew's a theatre-goer. Just as I arrived there, a man was handing a woman into a car. There was nothing familiar about his appearance at first—I don't even know why I watched him. He was well turned-out, well set-up, good-looking, everything correct, silk hat in his hand as he helped the woman in, and then, as he took his place beside her, he half-turned and looked at me. He couldn't resist it. He laughed in

"As he took his place beside her, he half-turned and laughed in my face."

my face—half a laugh and half a sneer. It was Matthew all the world over, and then the limousine shot away. I jumped into a taxicab, but it was hopeless. All I know is that on the Embankment the car turned eastward."

"It isn't much," the Inspector observed.

"It's something."

Sir Thomas reappeared. He was more agitated than ever.

"The whole thing is inconceivable," he exclaimed. "The burglars must have known every inch of the place and every particle of stock. Three-quarters of our best jewellery is missing, and seven of our safes, with their cash reserves, are absolutely rifled. I should put our losses down at something like a quarter of a million."

"Any insurance?" the Inspector asked.

Sir Thomas shook his head.

"A firm in our position," he said, a little stiffly, "is not able to insure itself, unfortunately. Now, tell me, please—Mr. Absolom, isn't it?—tell me just what steps you are taking. I must call a meeting of the directors at once, and report."

"We've commandeered your telephones down here," the latter announced, "and they've been given Government priority. The whole of what we consider the thieves' highway, from Aldgate eastward, is being watched and searched. Every police-station in London is looking out for the car and the

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van, and we've fifty motor-cyclists on the roads. So far as we can, we've drawn a cordon round every thoroughfare. Reports come in every few minutes to the inspector in charge of each district, and if it's anything important we are notified at once."

Sir Thomas nodded approval.

"Seems as though you ought to get them, eh?" he remarked, anxiously.

"We hope so, but you must remember that these are no ordinary thieves. Their plans inside the place seem to have been perfectly framed and carried out, and no doubt they've arranged for the getting away just as thoroughly. Their danger spot was turning into the Brompton Road here without exciting suspicion. Once away from the immediate neighbourhood, there are a good many tricks they might play. Unless we have definite news within the next few minutes, I should think the odds are in favour of their reaching their first hiding-place. It's when they try to deal with the stuff that I fancy we may come in."

"What about a reward?"

"That wouldn't make a shadow of difference so far as the Force is concerned," was the unencouraging reply. "We'd all give our next promotion step to lay our hands upon the man who planned this *coup*. Still, it might bring an informer in."

"I'll discuss the matter with my directors," Sir Thomas promised.

"You needn't lay too great stress upon it," Absolom advised him. "In any ordinary case I should recommend it, but I don't fancy there's a criminal or an ex-criminal in Europe with courage enough to inform against the man we have in mind."

"Why the mischief not?" Sir Thomas demanded, a little irritably. "You can give him police protection, I suppose?"

The Inspector nodded gravely.

"Yes," he admitted, "we could do that. The time would come, however, when he'd want a little freedom, a chance to spend the money. They all get like that. We can't protect them against themselves. We have a small black book, Sir Thomas, which the Chief Commissioner keeps, and in it are the names of four men and two women who, at different times within the last seven years, have found their way to Scotland Yard to inform against the man we have been talking about. They've had their money, or a part of it on account, and we've had their information. We scarcely knew their names. They drifted back into their own world, but not one of the six lived a week after having visited Scotland Yard. Two were

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returned as suicides, two were found drowned, the coroner's inquest on the other two was: 'Death at the hands of some person unknown.' They wouldn't accept police protection. They thought they could get away with it. They never have done. I don't think they ever will. Offer your reward by all means, Sir Thomas, but if it is an informer who claims it, he is looking for a quick form of suicide."

Sir Thomas was impressed, but inclined to be a little sarcastic.

"I suppose I ought to feel my establishment honoured by the attentions of such a paragon of crime?" he remarked.

The Chief Inspector rose to his feet.

"We'll move our headquarters to Scotland Yard now, Brett," he announced.

A sergeant presented himself at the door of the office, and saluted.

"Telephone message just in from Woking, sir," he reported. "A plain van, answering to the description of the one we're after, has been found in the lane leading down to the golf course."

"Found? Do you mean that there was no one with it?"

"No one at all, sir," the man replied. "I think it's the one we're after, though. There was a card pinned on to it with a bit of writing:—

"'Kindly return this van to Warren & Co., Brompton Road, who will remunerate.'"

The sergeant coughed; he was not quite sure whether a smile would have been in order.

"Well, I'm damned!" Sir Thomas exclaimed.

"That's Matthew all right!" Brett muttered.

THE Press ran riot, excelled itself in superlatives, and trotted out every time-worn phrase to blacken its headlines. A new era of scientific crime was prognosticated. No place henceforth would be safe. The guards at Buckingham Palace and the other treasure-houses of London must be doubled. The SUPERMAN had come—the SUPERMAN of Crime. Meanwhile police headquarters were stonily silent. They made no announcement, gave no hope. The very fact of their indifference to popular clamour was in a way encouraging. Yet the fact remained that, after four days of eager investigation and diligent combing of every criminal-frequented haunt in London, no arrest had been made nor any single clue discovered except that empty van with its impudent message. A high authority of the Yard, who was writing a book, and was reputed to take no interest whatever in crime, became alarmed at last and sent for the brains of the building, Chief Inspector Absolom.

"Is it true, Absolom, that we are up against a force of superior intelligence to ours?" he inquired, dryly.

"Equal, at any rate, Chief," was the cool reply. "All this breathless search we are conducting is necessary, of course, but the odds are a hundred to one against any useful results. We are up against the same gang who personated Lord Ellacott and Howson, the tennis player, and then robbed them. They are not ordinary criminals at all. We have the names and addresses of a hundred and thirty-two of what we call Class A burglars and misdemeanants on our books. We have to put these through a process of elimination, but, as a matter of fact, not one of them is likely to have ever seen or heard of the men we want."

"What are we going to do about it?" the high authority demanded. "The public expect protection from us, and they're beginning to wonder whether they're getting it. First the Ellacott and Howson burglaries—both on the same night—and then this hideous affair, you know. You'll have to change some of your head men, Absolom."

"Not just at present, Chief, if you please. Remember, we as nearly as possible got the Ellacott and Howson gang the same night. They only slipped through our fingers by a miracle."

"The miracles seem to work only one way," the high authority grumbled. "What am I to say to the Home Secretary?"

"Let me talk to him, if necessary, sir," the other begged. "The relative positions between us and the criminal world are entirely changed now, and the sooner we recognize it the better. Years ago, before all these recent scientific inventions, and before the educated classes took up crime, the odds were all in our favour. To-day the whole situation's altered. Given a certain type of intellectual who chooses deliberately to serve his apprenticeship and embrace crime as a profession, and the odds are in his favour, as against us."

"That's the sort of home truth the public would never accept without a clamour. It's a dangerous admission for anyone in your position to make, anyhow."

"It's the truth," was the dogged pronouncement, "but it isn't so terrifying as it sounds. I say that, take every enterprise singly with the luck being even, the odds are in favour of the criminal, but when it comes to bringing off, say, half-a-dozen affairs, the odds increase against him every time. The public know all about it when our *coup* comes off and we really get the man, but I assure you, sir, that if we could publish an account of everything that happened the

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night of the Ellacott and Howson burglaries, Scotland Yard wouldn't seem such a dud institute as they are trying to make us out."

"Who is the man you're pinning your faith on?" the authority inquired.

"A fellow named Brett, sir. Not much to look at, I'll grant you, but thoroughly sound. The most dangerous type for the criminal. He's a plodder, and yet he has inspiration, and isn't afraid to make use of it. He'll get our man yet, sir, if they'll only let us alone."

THE high authority, although he was only half satisfied, brought the interview to a close. His second in command returned to his room and sent for Brett.

"The Chief's had me on the carpet," he confided. "Any news?"

Brett was looking a little pinched. The routine work of the last few days had been a strain.

"This morning," he recounted, "I had my first success. I have either been to see myself, or communicated with, a hundred and forty dentists."

"Didn't know there were as many in the world."

"I found one this morning down in the City who treated a man with a tooth knocked out on the day after our affair. I have just come back to look through some records."

"What type of man was he?"

"His name was given as Ellis. He's a leather factor of Endale Street, Bermondsey. I've seen the warehouse. It's a neat little place just on the edge of the commercial district, and next to a couple of empty houses. There is a brass plate on the door, with the name of the firm on it—Ellis and Humphreys—and there was a dray taking some merchandise away. I dared not go in myself, of course, but I put the place under observation, and I hope to get a description of the partners to-day or to-morrow. That particular dray, by the by, was a disappointment. I had it followed to Liverpool Street Goods Station, but the cases contained nothing but leather, addressed to some manufacturers of children's boots and shoes—Chittuck and Baynes, of Norwich."

"What about this man Ellis?" the Chief Inspector interrupted. "Is he in the records at all?"

"No mention of him," Brett acknowledged. "I don't take any notice of that, though. Solomon was a highly respectable man, so was Vanderleyde, so was Wheatley. The game over here seems to be for Matthew and his friends to create identities through their subordinates, which they can assume when necessary. This firm of Ellis and Humphreys, for instance, may be conducted for that purpose, and that purpose only. If I'm on the right track, it probably does a certain amount of genuine business; the two partners, subsidized by Matthew, really exist, and when he comes along and needs an identity to shelter himself behind, there it is all ready for him. This is my theory, at any rate, and it's the one I'm working on."

"What's the next step? You haven't evidence enough to raid the place yet, have you?"

"Not yet. Nor am I thinking of calling on Mr. Ellis to inquire about his tooth. To-morrow, however, I shall get some further information about the place. I have a friend who's a small shoe manufacturer in the East-end. I did his son a good turn once, and he is only too anxious to pay it back. He is going in to buy some leather and have a look round. If he brings me the sort of information I want, I shall take out a search warrant."

"You haven't much to go on at present," the Chief Inspector reminded him a little dubiously.

"Perhaps not," Brett acknowledged, "and yet," he added, "when I'm on a clue I like to believe in it—it gives one confidence. I can't bring myself to believe anyhow that there were many men who needed a front tooth replacing on Thursday morning, and fewer still, I should think, who would choose to go to a complete stranger to have it done. My dentist had never seen Mr. Ellis before in his life. Had to have my teeth scaled to get him to talk—nasty painful job."

His superior smiled.

"Well, I will say this for you, anyhow, Brett," he remarked, "you are thorough."

BRETT, dressed with less care than usual, as though to bring himself into touch with his surroundings, sat before a marble-topped table in the saloon bar of the Three Kings Public House, near London Bridge, with a pipe in his mouth and a half a pint of beer in front of him. To him, in due course, entered Mr. Moses Klein, a shoe manufacturer from the Bethnal Green Road, a Hebraic-looking person, with black curly hair, and wearing what might have been a very fine diamond ring on his dirty third finger.

"Vell, vell," Mr. Moses Klein exclaimed, with a rather overdone start of surprise. "Fancy meeting you in these parts."

"Sit down and have a drink," Brett invited.

There was a brief interregnum of general conversation, during which Mr. Klein discoursed upon the state of business, the high price of leather, the health of his wife and son, and others of the family. As soon as

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the refreshments were served, however, he leaned forward in his chair.

"Funny sort of show," he confided. "Send no travellers out, and like to do their bithneth for cash. Suits me all right when I've got thomebody else's cash to pay with."

Brett nodded.

"You shall give just what the stuff's worth," he told him. "We'll make up the difference."

"It will be about fifteen per thent.," Mr. Klein said, cautiously. "You thee, Mr. Brett, I buy very cheap because I pay cash. They likes my money, these leather men. Ith good money, Mr. Brett."

"No doubt, but not quite so much of my name, please," the latter cautioned, dropping his voice a little. "Tell me some more about the place."

"Vell, they've got some stock, but they don't theem to know much about it," the other continued. "I buy a bale of goods, about forty pounds, but the funny part of it wath that they didn't theem to care much whether I bought or not. Not like me when I take my boot cathes out."

"Think," Brett begged, "was there anything about the place itself which struck you as being different from an ordinary warehouse?"

Mr. Klein reflected.

"Vell, there were a good many people hanging about for a small bithness, and except for one man upstairs, and another down, they none of them theemed to know very much about what there wath to thell. One of the bosses came out of the offith and thpoke to me, but he didn't theem to take any interest in what I wath buying. Now, when I go in anywhere else to buy goods, the bosses take off their coats and try to thell everything in the place. I think he wath upthet, though. He had a little accident."

"What sort of an accident?"

"He gave me a good thigar," Mr. Klein explained, "lit one himself, and thpat a front tooth out. Just had it put in, he thaid."

For a moment Brett sat quite still. Notwithstanding the sordidness of his surroundings it was for him a brief period of unadulterated joy. Then he pushed his tankard away, ordered fresh ones for his guest and himself, and re-lit his pipe.

"Moses Klein," he said, "you owe me a good turn, don't you?"

"Ain't that why I'm here?" the other rejoined, reproachfully. "I didn't want to come buying no leather from a thtick-in-the-mud firm like Ellis and Humphreys."

"Then just remember everything you can about that man Ellis's appearance. I've got to know exactly what he looked like."

"What he looked like," Mr. Klein declared, "wath a toff. He wath wearing clothes like they wear in those thwell warehouses in St. Thomas's Street, where they've got capital that runs into hundredth of thousandth of poundth. Kind of black coat, linen as though it had just come out of the laundry bathket, pressed pants, patent boots, and a gold thigarette case thticking out of hith pocket. He got no hair on his face, queer sort of eyes that theemed to be wandering about all the time, and one of them black felt hats with the top squashed in, like Rachel—that's my wife—wanth me to get. He looked a great deal too much of a toff for a thmall firm like they must be."

Brett held out his hand.

"We're quits, Klein," he said. "I'm glad I got your boy off that day. Drink up your beer, and then I must go. I want you, if you don't mind, just to get me a taxi. I mustn't be seen in these streets for an hour or so."

Mr. Klein obeyed cheerfully, and Brett, making his way to London Bridge Station, spent ten minutes in a telephone booth, and half an hour over a luncheon which he was grimly aware might be his last on earth.

IT was an evil afternoon down Bermondsey way. There was no absolute fog, but a mist had driven in from the river, and combined with the drizzling rain had created an atmosphere of obscurity and drear depression. With the electric light turned on in his little office, Mr. Ellis, proprietor of the firm of Ellis and Humphreys, with the help of an envelope cutter and a waste-paper basket, dealt at lightning speed with a mass of correspondence arrived by the foreign post, a correspondence which seemed a little excessive for the state of the business. By his side, watching keenly, and every now and then accepting one of the letters handed to him, stood the pseudo Mr. Humphreys, lank, lugubrious, yet alert, at times singularly reminiscent of Mr. Amos Wheatley, the cotton millionaire. They reached the end of the pile with only muttered words passing from one to the other. Then Mr. Ellis leaned back in his chair.

"You know how to deal with the letters you have," he said. "Take them down to Riverside Street and attend to them there."

The person addressed looked curiously at his partner.

"Anything wrong with this place?" he inquired.

His companion tapped a cigarette of fragrant quality upon the desk, and lit it.

"Nothing actually wrong," he admitted. "I've got one of my psychic fits, that's all.

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facturing, should you have thought that he would have used American offal?"

"No, I don't think I should," Britten acknowledged thoughtfully. "Max delivered the goods, and had a careful look round. Klein certainly had no heel-building machinery."

Mr. Ellis scowled into space. Customers asking for American offal were very unwelcome visitors in Endale Street just then.

"How many barrels are there in the cellar?" he asked.

The man counted upon his fingers.

"Twenty-seven."

"Well, they're sold, and we may as well get them out of the way at once. Address the labels—Mr. Jacob Rubel, Leather Dealer, Barcelona. Telephone for a dray, and have them delivered on board the *Juanita*, lying at Riverside Street Docks, this afternoon. And, Britten?"

"Yes, sir."

"If that fellow Klein comes in again, I'll see him myself."

"Very good, sir."

The man hurried off. Mr. Ellis opened the door and glanced out. In the warehouse was gloom and silence. In the far distance Britten was speaking down a wall telephone to the railway company. He stepped back into the office.

"What's the trouble?" his partner asked him again. "No warnings in, are there?"

"Not a word," the other acknowledged. "By all the rules of the game we should be as safe as though we were in the clouds. I doubled the watchers yesterday. Ludoff himself has a taxicab outside the big warehouse at the corner. No one could escape him. It's this damned weather gets on my nerves. Carry on here for a time, Maurice—don't go to Riverside Street."

The principal of the firm walked into the warehouse, and, pushing open a swing door at the farther end, crossed another room apparently full of linen-shrouded merchandise. Opposite to him was a door let into the wall, and almost unnoticeable. He opened this by touching a spring, passed along a passage, descended two steps, and with a Yale key opened a second and more formidable-looking door of sheet iron. Here he stepped into a different atmosphere. His feet fell upon a soft Turkey carpet. He touched an electric switch, and a very delightful man's sitting-room, save that it was curiously destitute of windows, was revealed. A correctly-attired manservant came hurrying in.

"No reports?" Mr. Ellis asked swiftly.

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Both wires in order?"

"Absolutely, sir. I tested them a few minutes ago."

"See if Ludoff is still on his taxicab."

The man disappeared for a moment, and returned.

"Still there, sir."

"The car is in the shed?"

"The engine has been going since eight o'clock, sir. Francis is at the wheel. He has fixed a new number plate, and there are two spare ones under the cushions."

"I'm clearing out for a time," Mr. Ellis announced abruptly. "Everything in order at Riverside Street?"

"Everything, sir. Were you thinking of moving there?"

"For a night or two, perhaps," his master decided, thoughtfully. "Take every precaution, but if you're sure the coast is clear, and there's no one hanging around, come down at eight o'clock. I want to go to the opera to-night, if possible."

"The usual code warning, sir, if there's anything disturbing?"

Mr. Ellis nodded.

"They won't be changed until to-morrow. Mix me a strong brandy cocktail, Morrison."

The man crossed the room noiselessly, opened a handsome walnut cabinet, produced the necessary bottles, with some ice from a zinc pail, and a silver shaker. Mr. Ellis drained the contents of a beautiful Venetian glass which was handed to him a moment or two later, and turned away. Outside the door he hesitated, and took a fateful decision. Instead of making his way back to the warehouse, he descended a narrow flight of stairs, and disappeared.

THE drayman with his load of twenty-seven barrels, and a very satisfactory tip in his pocket, rumbled up Endale Street, crossed Market Street, and on his way along St. Thomas's Street was mildly surprised by a signal to stop from a uniformed policeman, who stepped out from the kerb.

"What's wrong, governor?" he asked, cheerfully. "Ain't exceeding the speed limit, am I?"

A man in a mackintosh buttoned up to his chin, who had been loitering behind the policeman, stepped forward.

"Obey orders quickly," he directed. "I am Detective Brett of Scotland Yard, and there are several others of us here. Turn up under that arch to your right, and stop at the second lamp."

"Crikey, guv'nor!" the man exclaimed, as he whipped up his horse. "I ain't stolen these barrels, I can promise you that—just got 'em from Ellis and Humphreys in Endale Street. Ain't nothing wrong with them, is there?"

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"We are going to see," was the quick reply.

The dray, followed by the policeman and Brett, drove on a few yards, and turned in under one of those great gloomy arches, tubular chasms of mystery and darkness. At a sign from the policeman, who jumped on to the step, the driver brought the dray to a standstill under the second of the flickering, insufficient lamps. Down some dank stone steps came clattering half-a dozen more constables, one of whom produced a bag of tools and mounted the dray. Its attendant lit his pipe.

"My Gawd!" he muttered between his teeth, and wondered no longer at the magnitude of the tip which reposed in his waistcoat pocket.

The top of the first barrel was soon off. Inside were closely-packed fragments of reddish brown leather, which had evidently been cut through by a machine and left in the odd strips, here large, here small. From top to bottom two stalwart policemen thrust in their hands, and emptied the contents of the barrel on to the dray. When they had finished they stood up, waiting for instructions.

"Another one," Brett ordered, unperturbed.

They got to work and repeated the process. This time, however, they were barely half-way through when one of the policemen uttered a little exclamation. From his fingers dangled a necklace of glittering stones. They all gathered round to stare at it with fascinated eyes—a cascade of falling light, glowing and fading with the flickering of the poor illumination. Then Brett's voice was heard, sharp and incisive.

"Four of you guard the dray. Bicycled police for Endale Street. Rush the warehouse, and have your firearms ready."

A dozen men or more hurried to the bicycles which were leaning against the wall. Brett himself leapt into a small police car which seemed to have made a miraculous appearance. In less than five minutes it drew up outside the wide-opened doors of Messrs. Ellis and Humphreys. A warehouseman, flicking some sides of leather with a feather brush, looked up inquiringly at their entrance, but made no effort to stop them. Brett was the first to mount the stairs and push open the door leading to the office. Britten, in his long linen duster, was apparently engaged in sorting some skins at the counter. The only other occupant of the place was a man seated at a desk, typing some letters. Brett, with his automatic in his hand, and stooping a little as he ran, crossed the floor in half-a-dozen strides.

"Hands up!" he shouted, and his voice was like the crack of a revolver shot.

Mr. Humphreys, of Ellis and Humphreys, looked longingly at the drawer towards which his hand had wandered. Then he glanced into the steely blue eyes of the man who stood just out of reach, noted the tension of the forefinger, and his hesitation vanished. He raised his hands high above his head.

"Is this a hold-up?" he asked, calmly. "We have fourteen pounds and a small bill of exchange in the safe."

"Be quiet, Amos Wheatley, or whatever you call yourself down here!" Brett interrupted. "Where's the Chief?"

The shadow of a smile flickered across those grim lips.

"He had a psychic feeling," was the dry response.

THAT night the evening papers were full of the dramatic recovery of practically the whole of the jewellery stolen in the great night raid upon the Kensington Emporium, the capture of one of the leaders of the gang, and the detention of a number of its subordinates. Scotland Yard regained all its former prestige, compliments were showered upon the police, and leading articles acclaimed their acumen. Brett was warmly congratulated by the high authority of the Yard, and almost embraced by Absolom. Photographs appeared everywhere of the bogus warehouse and the secret abode adjoining it, which, without a doubt, had been one of the headquarters of the great criminal organization. Nevertheless, Philip Brett slept with a sob in his heart, for somewhere under the murky skies Matthew was smiling.

(Next month: "The Doubtful Guest.")

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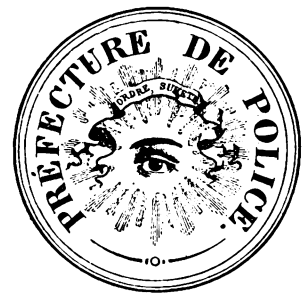
THIS ASTOUNDING CASE IS FACT—NOT FICTION.

CASES FROM MY CRIME-BOOK



THE "EYE OF THE POLICE."
Badge of Parisian Detectives.

By

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

(Interpreter at the Criminal Courts)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The stories which I have selected for this series can be found in the official records, only one or two details having been rearranged in order to avoid giving pain and reopening old wounds.

No. 16 "The Happy Death"

LEBRUN, the little Sûreté analyst, came into my office with a rueful face.

"This serum is delicate stuff to prepare," he said. "Ten of my rabbits died last week, and I've had to start again. I managed to make a few superficial tests, however, by drawing off the single precious drop that remained into a capillary tube."

"Well," I asked, "with what result? Human or animal blood?"

"Human blood, I believe; but it might be from a pig. However, since pigs don't generally travel in taxis——" and he shrugged his shoulders with a whimsical smile.

"That's not the point," said the voice of M. Bertillon, from the door, where he had stood for a moment unnoticed by us. "Inferences are useless. The bloodstains which have been found twice in the same taxi need not be the vestiges of a murder. They may have been deliberately left to lead us astray. You do not know what they are, then?"

"No, sir; as yet I cannot be sure. Under the microscope the blood of a pig is the same as a man's. Only the positive reaction of the serum can be depended upon."

"Very well. Then we have to wait until you have prepared more, but since that will take some time, our investigation must meanwhile accept the theory that a crime has been committed. It is more than likely. But I don't like building a positive edifice on a negative foundation."

"No bodies have been found yet?" I asked.

"Oh, yes—two. But there is nothing to connect them definitely with the taxi mystery. Come to my office and I will let you have the details, such as they are. There is some delicate laboratory work in

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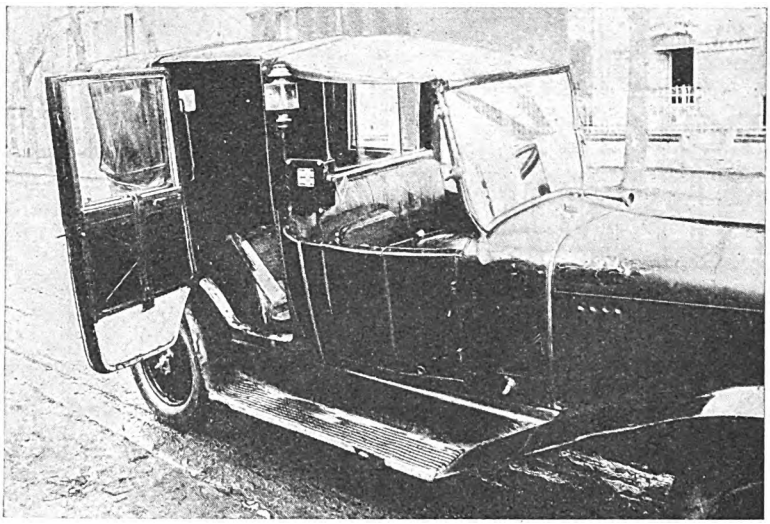
store for us, and I'd like you to know where we stand before you begin."

"I think I remember the circumstances," I hazarded. "Two months ago the taxi



The fatal taxi as it was found after the disappearance of Etienne Lafontaine.

469-Y-29 was found abandoned on the road to Le Havre. It belonged to a garage proprietor in Caen and had been driven by a chauffeur named Raolle.

"The man who discovered the car at once informed the local police and they carried out a preliminary inquiry. There were bloodstains on the dashboard, blood had soaked into the coconut matting on the floor, and the upholstery was also stained."

Bertillon nodded without speaking, and I saw that he was checking my account of the case from his own notes.

"Nothing has been heard of the driver from that day to this. Who the passenger was is still unknown——"

"That is what the newspapers reported," my chief interrupted; "but we have every reason to believe that the car had been hired by a jeweller named Cottin. The jeweller disappeared, and his business was found to be on the verge of bankruptcy. There was hardly any stock and many debts. Whether Cottin murdered the chauffeur or *vice versa*, I don't know. I was not called in. The car was repainted and sent out on the road again. Four weeks ago the same fatal taxi was discovered abandoned on a deserted country road. Again there were bloodstains on the driver's seat and on the cushions in the car. Whether it is human blood or not only the serum Lebrun is preparing will show. Emile Codorin, the chauffeur, has not been seen since leaving the garage. We believe that the passenger was a young fellow named Etienne Lafontaine, manager of a big ironworks at Rouen. He had been drinking heavily and generally going the pace for some time previously. He has vanished also. As I said, only two bodies have been found recently. One was taken from the river and had been in the water so long that it could not be identified, but the clothes appear to be those of the first driver, Raolle. The other was found on the railway line and was so mangled that recognition by relatives is impossible. The taxi is now believed to be haunted and no one will drive it. Queer story, isn't it? Four men presumably dead in the same vehicle, but no bodies near the spot, and, so far as we know, no large sum of money stolen. Yet another mysterious disappearance is that of the banker Lastolle. No trace of him either. A warrant had been issued for his arrest on a charge of embezzlement. He cleverly slipped through our fingers at the last minute, and, although detectives are

Raolle, the chauffeur of the fatal taxi.

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watching every harbour and frontier station, he has vanished."

"But what has Lastolle to do with taxi 469-Y-29?" I asked.

"I am not suggesting that there is any connection, but it is a curious coincidence that his car was also found near Caen. Furthermore, he and the two missing passengers of the fatal taxi were in great financial difficulties. Lafontaine believed he was ruined and told several people that he intended to commit suicide. He had invested all his money in those oil wells in Tonkin which were reported a swindle, but which unexpectedly turned out to be immensely rich. The shares which everyone believed to be worthless have already jumped to double their original price. It may be, of course, that some madman is responsible for the deaths of all these people. It is a pity I was not called in at once. However, there may still be something which the local police overlooked. So, since several days must elapse before Lebrun can prepare fresh serum, we will leave early to-morrow and inspect the *débris* of Lastolle's car and the mysterious taxi. I will send for you later when I have the result of the post-mortem on those two bodies."

THE MISSING AMERICANS.

TO my surprise and delight, when I opened the door of the laboratory I perceived a tall muscular figure standing by the window. One glance at the bronzed, clean-shaven face was sufficient.

"Bannister!" I cried, stepping eagerly forward and clasping his hand. "I thought you were in New York!"

"I was, and I fully expected to stay there. But Paris still holds the record for queer happenings, so the chief sent me back to look into things."

"What has New York to do with our latest puzzle?"

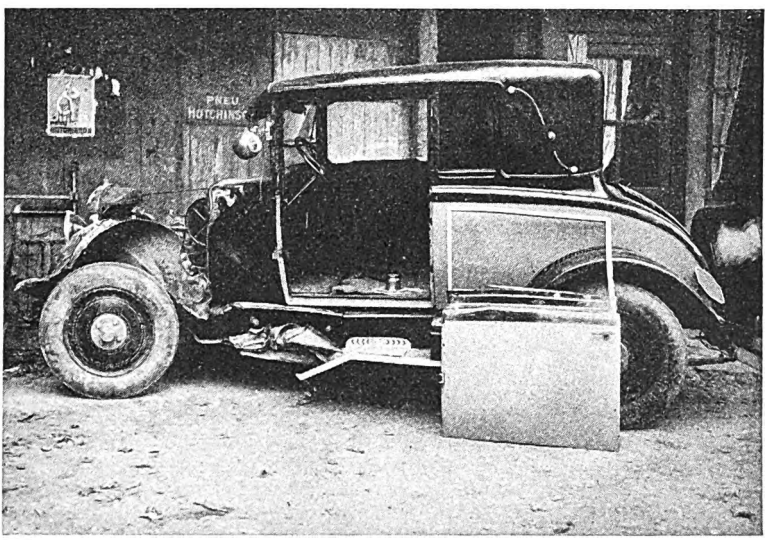
"I don't know yet; but Calder, the Wall Street broker, came to Paris six months ago to open an office. His wife has had no news of him and there are many of his clients who would like to know what's become of their money. Then there is Hellor, the film star. He left his company when they'd finished their stunts on the Riviera. No one knows where he is, but his last letter was written from the Rue de Rivoli. So I'm here to investigate."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"They were not killed or I should have heard of it. Probably the attractions of Montmartre proved stronger than those of Broadway. Have you seen Dufresne?"

"Yes—he is getting all the information he can from the special service that keeps a watch on foreigners. Meanwhile, I thought I'd look you up. Can you take me to Bertillon?"

I was about to go to the private telephone when the door opened and a messenger informed me that my chief required my presence immediately. Seated in Bertillon's office was a young and deliciously pretty girl. Golden wavy hair surrounded a vivacious, delicately-tinted face. The eyes, as she turned and looked at us, were blue like an Italian sky, and the slightly tip-tilted nose gave a piquant touch, which was increased by the two dimples that suddenly appeared at sight of Bannister behind me.



The car of Lastolle under which were found the glove and address of Chundah Lal.

"Why, Jim!" she cried, in English. "Fancy seeing you here. This *is* luck. I am in such trouble."

Bannister stared in surprise; then he sprang past me and seized the girl's outstretched hand.

"This is Miss Marcelle O'Connor," he

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said, looking at us in turn. "I don't know why she's in Paris—but if she needs help, count me in. Her people and mine were great friends out West."

"Mademoiselle is greatly distressed," Bertillon said when he had greeted Bannister and we had all found seats, "because her *fiancé*, Etienne Lafontaine, has disappeared. Strangely enough, we were discussing the case only a short time ago. Perhaps you will relate what you know once more, mademoiselle. But wait until Inspector Rousseau comes. I have sent for him."

MISS O'CONNOR'S STORY.

MISS O'CONNOR nodded and pulled out a bundle of papers. A few minutes later Rousseau — better known as the Brigadier—arrived. His face flushed with pleasure when he perceived Bannister, and a delighted grin transformed his rugged, weather-beaten face.

"Now, mademoiselle——" our chief prompted.

"Well—although I was born in Colorado, my mother is French. Her family lives in Paris, and I often spent a month or two with them. It was at their house I met Etienne Lafontaine. I guess it was a case of love at first sight, and we were soon engaged. Our wedding had been fixed for this summer, so I remained with my aunt. I just couldn't bear the idea of not seeing Etienne every day. I love him so. But you know the saying about the course of true love. Lately Etienne had been very unhappy. Something went wrong with his business. I heard him talking to uncle and gathered that he had gambled in stocks and gone the limit. Every penny of his money was sunk in some company in Indo-China which hadn't made good.

"Finally, he said we couldn't marry because he would never drag me down into poverty with him. As if I cared so long as we were together. As the days passed and no news came from Saigon he became moody and silent. I lived in constant terror of some desperate act on his part. Etienne has always been very highly strung and romantic. He was more a poet and dreamer than a business man. Then one day he received a long cable from the East. I went to his office and found him sitting at his desk with his head in his hands, and before him was a gun. I am myself inclined to be emotional. The result was I called him a coward. I suppose we were both in a silly state of nerves. Anyhow, we quarrelled bitterly. I hoped to shame him into fighting on, but perhaps I said more than I should have done. When I left I carried the pistol away with me, but we had practically broken off our engagement. I never saw him again." Tears rolled down the girl's cheeks and she gulped convulsively. "I heard that he began to spend his nights in cabarets and dance halls—drinking with women of low repute.

"And then suddenly a month ago he disappeared. I received a last letter from him in which he bade me good-bye and informed me that he intended to take his own life. I learned only recently that, on the day he wrote that letter, Etienne had drawn all his money from the bank—about eighty thousand francs, and that he had borrowed another twenty thousand from my uncle. That's why I've come to you. Etienne would never have borrowed money if he meant to kill himself. I'm afraid he's been murdered. He probably had the whole sum on him. Oh, my poor Etienne! If only we had not quarrelled! Those shares in the oil company are worth a fortune to-day."

"Please give me the photograph of Etienne Lafontaine which I see you have in your bag," said M. Bertillon. "Thank you. I should also like to have a list of the places where he was last seen and the names of his friends."

"And do you think there is any hope, Monsieur Bertillon? Has my poor Etienne been murdered, or is it possible that he is being kept a prisoner?"

"Our criminals do not often hold people for ransom, mademoiselle, but do not despair yet. I will let you know the result of our search to-morrow."

THE FAKED CAR-SMASH.

THE next morning we gathered in M. Bertillon's office, ready for our trip to Caen to examine the sinister blood-stained taxi and the charred remains of Lastolle's car. Bannister had insisted on joining us, and his presence was very welcome. The Sûreté could be trusted to do the spade-work in his own investigation, and until this was completed he was free to assist Miss O'Connor. Bertillon had gone to obtain the report of the doctors who were examining the two mutilated bodies which had been found. He appeared shortly before ten, and I saw by his expression that the result of the post-mortem was not satisfactory.

"Queer things have been happening lately," he said when we were rushing at full speed along the departmental road. "The man fished from the river was not drowned. Dr. Maupert says he died of consumption. And the other man was dead when the train passed over him. Anyway, neither is Lafontaine nor Lastolle."

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Bannister looked at us with a strange tense expression. "Would they be the Americans I'm searching for, do you think, chief?"

"I can't tell yet, but I've left a note for Dufresne. He'll compare the photographs you gave him with the measurements and indications obtained by Dr. Maupert."

The day was well advanced when at last our car swerved from the road and bumped to a halt on the fringe of a pine forest. Lastolle's coupé stood in a small clearing not far from a winding path which dwindled and lost itself among the trees. The front wheels were partly burnt and the mud-guards and bonnet twisted as from a terrific impact. The furrows the wheels had cut in the soil appeared especially to interest M. Bertillon, and he crawled about on hands and knees, peering at the marks between them with his lenses. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of delight and I saw that he had found a dirty glove which had been half hidden in the earth. As he lifted it a crumpled scrap of paper fell to the ground. This he smoothed out on his knees and we all bent eagerly forward to inspect the find.

Marcelle O'Connor, whose *fiancé*, Etienne Lafontaine, disappeared.

"'Chundah Lal. Enclos des Lilas,'" Bertillon read. "An address, evidently, and written hurriedly in pencil. Chundah Lal—now what can that be? Sounds like an Indian name. Well, we'll see if there is such a place as the Enclos des Lilas. This car was driven purposely against a tree. Then it was wheeled here by three people. See how deeply their toes have marked on each side and behind. They were putting their weight forward and straining with all the strength of their legs. We'll take plaster casts of these footprints. One wore elegant pointed shoes, the others had big heavy boots with nails in them. The ignition was switched off—proof that the engine was not running. No signs of a struggle, but a bullet-hole in the dashboard, made by a shot fired from above and behind the driver. These men intended to burn the car, but bungled it somehow. According to the police, Lastolle had discharged his chauffeur a week before. So he was probably driving himself. If those pointed shoes belonged to Lastolle, then he helped the other two to wreck and set fire to his car. But, of course, 'Pointed Toes' may have been one of the gang who murdered the banker. Now let us go to the garage and see the haunted taxi. Afterwards we will inquire about the man with the Hindu name."

The garage proprietor conducted us with evident reluctance to where the mysterious vehicle stood in a shed by itself. The front mud-guard was bent and the bonnet had been torn off.

"That was how it was found," the man informed us. "It was a nice coupé and often hired by people who had business calls to make. Now that four people have been murdered in it no one will ever drive it again. It is bewitched."

"What was the name of the first chauffeur?" Bertillon asked.

"He was a Parisian named Raolle. He had been chauffeur in a foreign gentleman's house. An Oriental, I believe. There was some trouble over religion, but he came to me with excellent references. The car was in a fair way of becoming his own when he disappeared, poor chap."

"How do you mean? Was he buying it?"

"Yes; it's a rule of mine with all my drivers, a kind of insurance. So much daily is deducted from their earnings; to that I add a fifth, and when a certain amount is reached the cab belongs to them, and they set up on their own. It ensures good service, too, for if they leave me they lose what they've paid."

"So this Raolle would lose several thousand francs by going? I see," Bertillon commented, thoughtfully. "Have you by any chance the name of his former employers?"

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AGAIN "CHUNDAH LAL."

THE taxi-owner pulled out an account-book from a shelf and turned the leaves rapidly.

"Here you are, sir: a Mme. Dolores d'Annecy, Rue du Trocadero, Passy. H'm-m—I was mistaken about the Oriental—now where did I get that idea?" and the man closed his eyes and drummed on the desk. Suddenly he turned to M. Bertillon. "Of course, the second poor fellow, who disappeared a month ago whilst driving the same car, had worked for an Oriental, a Monsieur Chundah Lal——"

Bertillon turned angrily at my involuntary exclamation. "Do you know the name?" he asked me stonily. I hastily disavowed all knowledge of Hindus in general. Fortunately the old garage proprietor had turned to his book again. "Chundah Lal, that's it, sir," he cried, "and he lived at Versailles. Enclos des Lilas."

This time we were all prepared for the startling news and our faces were coldly indifferent.

"Tell me, sir," Bertillon continued. "If all your drivers died or disappeared when a tidy sum has been amassed by your private insurance system, you'd make a good thing out of it, eh?"

The old fellow threw up his hands in horror. "I—Heaven forbid, sir. Whatever has been paid is divided amongst the others." He shivered at the meaning behind my chief's words. "You're making a terrible suggestion. Besides, what about the passengers?"

"Ah, yes, I was coming to that. Who were they?"

"I don't know. My men are quite independent and make their own arrangements. They pay me according to the mileage on the meter. Yet I did see the man who hired the car the night the second driver vanished, but I don't know his name."

Bertillon showed him several photographs, among which was that of Lafontaine. The proprietor at once picked it out.

"That is the man," he cried, shrilly, "although he was dressed differently."

Our examination of the car, from which four men had so mysteriously disappeared, was without result. But a month had passed since the last tragedy, and this was only to be expected. Bertillon was singularly thoughtful on our journey back to headquarters. For a time he paced restlessly up and down his office, whilst we stood and discussed the case in subdued tones. At last he came over to me and said, "You and Monsieur Bannister had better go to the Enclos des Lilas at Versailles, and Rousseau shall make inquiries about this Mme. d'Annecy. That sounds like an assumed name. Report to me to-morrow. Yes"—as a knock sounded on the door. A gendarme came in with a note.

"This is from Dr. Maupert," Bertillon said, when he had scanned it. "Both those bodies he is at work on show extreme emaciation. He believes that if they did not actually die of starvation, they had at any rate eaten no solid food for days. *Tonnerre*—this is getting to be queer! I must sit down and think it out. Send my secretary to me with my private records of the last twenty years. Now get along; I wish to remain undisturbed."

I suggested to Bannister that we should go to Versailles first and then call at Passy on our way back.

WE VISIT CHUNDAH LAL.

THE Enclos des Lilas was a stately country mansion standing in a spacious park on the outskirts of the little historical town. The difficulty was how to gain admittance without arousing suspicion. The local Brigadier of gendarmes informed us that the owner of the house was seldom there. He had the reputation of being a learned man and was noted for his generosity. When I suggested a visit as a Government official the Brigadier shook his head doubtfully.

"We should not like to offend him. The Sûreté cannot possibly have any reasons for annoying Monsieur Chundah Lal. There must be some mistake."

I saw that we should get little help from the local authorities, but the mention of charities gave me an idea. Much as I hated it, some kind of disguise was necessary. Bannister, of course, hailed my suggestion with delight, and we returned in all haste to his office in the Rue Scribe, where we transformed ourselves into passable clergymen. Some visiting-cards were quickly printed on his efficient little hand press, and thus equipped we rang the huge gong at the gates of the Enclos des Lilas. A servant, whose face appeared the darker for his white linen turban and clothes, admitted us with a courteous wave of the hand. I stated that I desired to speak to M. Chundah Lal, whereat he raised his eyebrows and replied that his Excellency only received visitors by appointment, but since we had obviously come some distance the secretary could perhaps spare a few minutes. I gave the man my card and followed on his heels to the house. Wealth and good taste were apparent in every detail, and I foresaw that our task was going to be difficult. This

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feeling was increased when after a very few moments a young, elegantly-dressed Hindu entered silently and said with a bow that his Excellency consented to receive us.

So we had our first glimpse of that strange and fantastic being, Chundah Lal, whose personality exhaled an air of dignity and mystery such as I have encountered in no other man. At the outset I only saw his eyes—large, luminous, and masterful; indeed, the face and figure seemed but an inadequate frame to these eyes. Under their gaze I had the feeling that not only our object but our very souls were laid bare. When the silence bade fair to become oppressive, the Hindu, who had risen at our entry, spoke in a deep sonorous voice in perfect English :—

"You appear to be English clergy, I perceive, gentlemen"—and he smiled a slow, ironical smile. "May I ask if you have been—ahem—ordained—since many hours?"

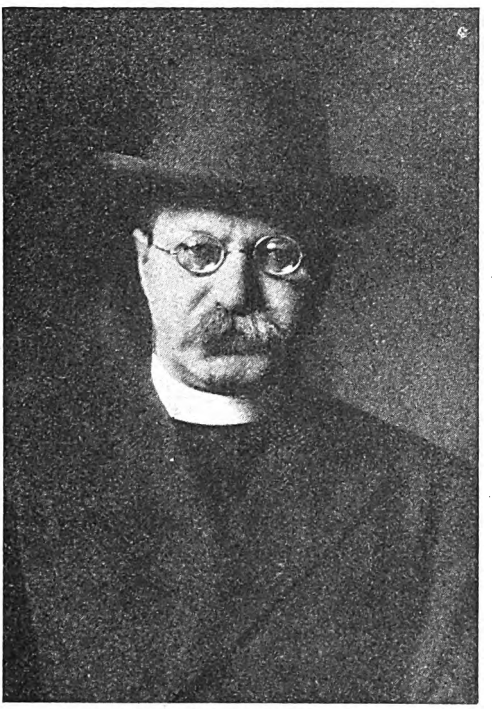
I tried my utmost to meet his mocking gaze. I am not easily embarrassed, and hardened myself with the thought that after all this venerable Oriental was probably only a criminal, but the effort proved unavailing. Under the compelling magnetism of those eyes I felt helpless.

"Why, of course," Bannister interposed with an attempt at dignity. "I don't quite understand your question."

"Don't you? Then let me put it plainly. Why do you wear spectacles that fit too tightly, but which nevertheless have not marked your nose? Why, furthermore, do *you*, who are obviously American, pretend to be English? And how is it, since this card has an English address, that the ink is still so fresh that it has smudged and stained my fingers? Come, suppose you drop all this and tell me what you want. What are you—crooks—or police?"

The sight of Bannister's face at this cool question was the last straw. I could not help it—I burst into a roar of laughter—in which my friend joined. Chundah Lal smiled broadly. "That's better. You are not crooks—or you would not laugh. Now, what have I done to deserve the visit of detectives?"

It was useless to fence after this, so I explained quite simply that we had found his name and address in a car which had been abandoned, and that we wished to ask a few questions regarding his former chauffeur. The Hindu listened gravely, but when I had finished he shook his head and said :—



Mr. Ashton-Wolfe in the disguise of a clergyman in which he visited Chundah Lal.

"I am afraid I cannot help you. Many people who are strangers to me have my address, for I have some reputation as a seer. As for the chauffeur, I know nothing about him. He served me for a year, but he would not conform to our ways, so I discharged him."

CHUNDAH LAL WEAKENS.

We rose and were about to go, when the secretary entered hurriedly and said something in a language we did not understand, at the same time holding out a telegram. With a curt word of apology, Chundah Lal tore it open. For a second his calm deserted him. I saw that his hand trembled and his face twitched. Then he was cool and collected again. A wave of his slim hand dismissed us, and, bowing, we accompanied the servant to the gates. Once outside, Bannister seized my arm. "Quick! let's get to a telephone. Ask Dufresne to send an inspector to the Western Union cable office in the Rue Scribe. That was a cablegram from America. Time four-forty-five, addressed to the Enclos des Lilas. Tell him to get a duplicate. He's a deep one, that Indian—but he lost his balance just for a second."

When we reached headquarters a copy had already arrived. It was in cipher,

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and since the message was long we only succeeded in decoding it after some difficulty. The language was Italian and the text vague and carefully worded, but, such as it was, we realized that Chundah Lal was not the benign if sharp-witted patriarch he appeared.

"Terrible news," it ran. "Number seventeen has broken harness and taken ship to Europe. Too late to stop him. Act on his arrival—s.s. *Bordeaux*—will arrive Cherbourg nineteenth."

The sender's name was Mario Silvano, and the cable had been handed in at Boston, Massachusetts.

The next day we held a consultation in Bertillon's office, at which Colbert and Dufresne were present. Rousseau had not returned from his investigation at Passy, but orders had been given that he was to come up as soon as he arrived.

"It has been definitely established," Bertillon said, addressing Bannister, "that the man who hired the fatal taxi, 469-Y-29, on the night it was discovered for the first time on the road to Le Havre was Calder, your Wall Street broker. The bloodstains and the disappearance of passenger and chauffeur seem to point to a crime. I am afraid we can give little hope to Miss O'Connor, for the second time this same car was found under similar conditions it had been hired by Etienne Lafontaine. As you know, he and the driver, Codorin, have also vanished completely. Some devilish organization for systematic and wholesale murder is behind all this, and I believe that Lastolle, the banker, is another of their victims. Curiously enough, they seem to choose only men who are in trouble and tired of life. How they get rid of the bodies remains a mystery.

"It is probable that Hellor, the film actor you are seeking, has also met with foul play at the hands of the same gang. He was seen several times at Armenonville with this Dolores d'Annecy. Perhaps she is their decoy. The moment we had your message yesterday, all conversations from Chundah Lal's telephone were taken down. Soon after you left someone called up Passy and informed Mme. d'Annecy of the cable from America. They spoke in English—so we got it all right. The speaker concluded by saying, 'Look out for two in-

"What are you—crooks—or police?"

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quisitive strangers,' and an accurate description of both of you was given. We must also remember that one of the chauffeurs who vanished after driving the mysterious taxi had worked for Mme. d'Annecy; the other had been employed by the Indian. Whether they are accomplices or not I cannot tell yet. I have men watching at Versailles and Passy. To-morrow is the nineteenth mentioned in their cable, so you had better go to Cherbourg to meet the boat. Keep well hidden and dress as porters or stevedores. Emissaries of the Hindu will certainly be there, and you will thus discover who the passenger is the cable warned them against. Ah—here is Rousseau! Well, Brigadier, what news?"

The old fellow—excellently disguised as a loafer—had entered on Bertillon's words.

ROUSSEAU'S DISCOVERIES.

"IT was impossible to get into the house, monsieur," he said. "But I saw enough to make me realize that we are dealing with a strange household. She is a beautiful woman, this Mme. d'Annecy. A kind of Carmen; dark and mysterious. I had taken up a post near the gates at first. But I discovered a second entrance in a small alley at the back. Some queer customers drifted in and out whilst I was there. They were dressed as servants and tradesmen, and for a time I was fooled; but when I saw the chauffeur I perceived that this was only a blind. Although he wore an elegant livery and had shaved off moustache and beard, there was no mistaking his six foot four of misshapen bone and sinew. It was Sergeant Cleremont."

"What! The man who was nearly murdered by his wife a year ago, and disappeared soon after?" Dufresne cried in surprise.

"Yes; I recognized him at once. He shot the two *apaches* his wife had hired, if you remember. The Courts acquitted him, and he thereupon began to haunt the taverns of the underworld in search of the treacherous woman. Then suddenly he vanished completely. Now he is chauffeur to that Mme. d'Annecy."

"Very well; return to Passy and follow her wherever she goes. Be careful. They are clever people."

Long before the boat was due, Bannister, Colbert, and I were trundling barrels and cases of merchandise along the busy quayside. We had not only dressed for the part, but grime and artificial tan had so transformed our faces that we felt fairly safe. We saw no one resembling the people we were after until the gangway had been lowered. Then I saw the secretary who had received us at Versailles; he was standing with several surly-looking ruffians near the Customs barrier. It was well we had been cautious, for two of the men were posted with their

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backs to the young Hindu, watching the crowd behind him. The secretary lingered until long after the last passenger had disappeared, and his face wore a perplexed and disappointed expression. Finally, when the ship began to warp to her berth, where the derricks were waiting to unload her, he clambered into a waiting car, followed by three of his men. The others had evidently received orders to remain in Cherbourg. Colbert elected to keep them under observation whilst we shadowed the secretary. Something had miscarried, for he drove straight to the big house in Versailles, and soon after a telephone message to Passy was intercepted. It was short and purposely vague :—

"Not on board unless stowaway. Three agents on duty near the ship."

A LETTER FROM ETIENNE.

TWO days passed now in tedious watching and waiting. Any hasty action would only result in failure, since we had no tangible evidence against anyone. I was in the midst of a discussion with M. Bertillon when a knock came on the door and Bannister entered, followed by Miss O'Connor. Something unexpected had happened, for the girl was trembling with suppressed excitement and her eyes sparkled.

"I've had a letter from my sweetheart!" she cried shrilly, waving a sheet of paper. "A letter—and, what's more, the Crédit Lyonnais telephoned this morning requesting me to call at their head office. Two cheques were presented yesterday signed by Etienne. One was for ten and the other for fifty thousand francs. The manager, who is a friend of the family, stopped payment until he had spoken with me. He says that the signature is undoubtedly that of Monsieur Lafontaine, and since there is no actual proof that he is dead, he will have to pay."

My chief stared blankly. I saw how much such an unforeseen event startled him. "Sit down, mademoiselle," he said, quietly, "and let me see that letter. I hope you have brought others for comparison? Good, you have! Just a moment, please. I am going to ask the manager to send me those cheques at once." And he gave an order over the telephone. "Now, what does the letter say? H'm-m—no address. Ordinary cheap notepaper, commercial ink. Postmark Rue St. Anne; that's in the Avenue of the Opera." He quickly scanned the missive. "Very vague, isn't it? There are reasons why he had to disappear suddenly; he is now in Paris, but dare not come openly. You are to meet him to-night at the embankment near the Alexander Bridge. Strange! Please leave these letters, mademoiselle, and come back this afternoon."

"Oh, but, Monsieur Bertillon, how coldly you say that! I am so happy—so happy! I am sure Etienne is alive and well; don't you think so too?"

"I cannot say as yet, but you will know to-night. The appointment is for ten o'clock. You must keep it and we shall be near to protect you."

"To protect me! From my beloved Etienne?"

"Well, if it *is* the young man, there will be no need. But please do not be too hopeful. You see, this letter may have been written some time ago, and the cheques also. Only in our laboratory can we make sure of that. Not a word to anyone! Monsieur Bannister will accompany you and stay with you until this afternoon."

The poor girl looked from one to the other of us in mute appeal, but we all shared Bertillon's apprehension. The sight of her wistful, tear-filled eyes went to my heart, but it was better to prepare her for the worst. I

Etienne Lafontaine, the investigation of whose disappearance led to the exposure of Chundah Lal.

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thought with a shudder of the blood-stained taxi and the alert and mocking face of the Hindu. Bannister rose and escorted her to the door. He turned at the threshold and looked a question at Bertillon.

"Stay with mademoiselle until nine and try to keep her from dwelling too much on this business. Then bring her here in a closed car."

Shortly after they had gone an *employé* arrived from the bank.

"I have come at the manager's request, sir, because I formerly cashed many of Monsieur Lafontaine's cheques. These are certainly genuine. I know his signature."

Bertillon examined the cheques. "I see one is made payable to a James Fradell and was handed in to your London branch four days ago. Did you make inquiries about this Fradell?"

"Oh, yes, we have telegraphed; no doubt we shall have a reply to-morrow."

Bertillon requested the man to wait, and beckoned to me to accompany him to the laboratory. Our instruments failed, however, to disclose any of the usual traces of forgery. Bertillon looked puzzled.

"These cheques and the letter are an unexpected move. Probably the Oriental heard of the large sums standing to Lafontaine's credit, but he must be a clever penman."

"What does the appointment with Miss O'Connor signify, do you think, sir?" I asked.

"They may intend to abduct her and then force her to write to her family as though she were with Lafontaine."

"But," I objected, "isn't it just possible that he *is* alive? That he was a prisoner and escaped. He may be the unknown referred to in that cable."

"Then why does he not at once communicate with us; present himself in person at the bank and appear openly to aid us in capturing those who kidnapped him? Anyway, that point is soon settled. If this letter was written a month ago, the chemical tests I am about to apply will show the ink to be old."

Dolores d'Annecy, the decoy of Chundah Lal.

I watched breathlessly whilst my chief manipulated acids and microscope. Suddenly he thumped the table with rage. "Devil take it! The ink is quite fresh. Well, report at nine. I am going to prepare a trap which I hope will catch our quarry to-night."

THE RENDEZVOUS ON THE BRIDGE.

WE assembled at the Alexander Bridge in good time and concealed ourselves in closed cars, which crossed and recrossed in order to avoid attracting attention. My heart beat fast as ten o'clock approached. Detectives and police were hidden at each end of the bridge and cycle police guarded the streets leading to it. The night was wet and boisterous and the few pedestrians hurrying by paid no attention to us. As the hour chimed from a church across the river, we alighted and walked quickly to a stone lion on the corner, before which Miss O'Connor was already pacing up and down. I knew that Bannister was hidden somewhere near, but I could not see him. Suddenly Bertillon gripped my arm and pulled me into the shadows. A tall figure had appeared abruptly beside the girl. We were close enough to hear the cry she gave, and saw her throw her arms around the man with a gesture of joy.

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Bertillon's breath hissed sharply and he sprang forward, just as Bannister emerged from a recess and grasped the unknown by the shoulder. At his touch the man twisted round with animal swiftness and made as though to escape, but we had now closed round.

"It's Etienne—Etienne," the girl sobbed, wildly. "Oh, monsieur, I knew he was alive—my dear one."

Bertillon pointed to the police car.

"You will please both come to headquarters," he said, sharply. "I am glad for the young lady's sake that you are not dead, monsieur, but we shall want an explanation from you. Come, my car will hold five."

Not a word more was spoken by any of us until we reached the Quai des Orfèvres.

"Now," said my chief when we were all in his office. "Kindly tell us why you suddenly disappeared a month ago, monsieur. Begin where you like, but remember, we know your movements up to the evening when you hired taxi number 469-Y-29."

At the words Etienne sprang up, a look of fear on his handsome face. As I now saw him, a tall muscular man of thirty or thereabouts, he struck me as singularly likeable. His brilliant black eyes scanned our faces for a moment as though seeking an ally, then his expression hardened ominously.

"I can tell you nothing, gentlemen. I have already broken my word by returning to Paris. I cannot honourably go a step farther."

"As you like," Bertillon answered, coldly. "But then you will be detained until the mystery of the bloodstained taxi is cleared up—and until we know what has become of all the other men."

"Bloodstained taxi!" Lafontaine cried, sharply. "I know nothing about that. I never was in this car which you have already twice mentioned."

"Let me refresh your memory, then. You have just returned from Boston on the s.s. *Bordeaux*, and your arrival was known to Chundah Lal and Mme. d'Annecy."

"Good heavens! You know about them already?" the man exclaimed.

Bertillon nodded. "By now they and their band are arrested. You see, for your own sake and Miss O'Connor's, you had better be frank."

Lafontaine gazed wildly around. "How did you find out about the Euthanasian society?"

Bannister whistled.

"Euthanasia, eh? The happy death! So that's what has become of my American friends?"

"No, no—you are quite mistaken. That is merely a name. Those men are all alive, just as I am."

"Come, come, sir," Bertillon interposed. "You are only making matters worse for yourself and these people. You cannot be accused of betraying them. Sooner or later we should know the whole truth, anyhow. Again I entreat you, for Miss O'Connor's sake, to avoid the scandal of your arrest on a capital charge. Better tell us what happened."

THE SECRETS OF THE EUTHANASIAN SOCIETY.

FOR a long time Lafontaine sat with his head in his hands, whilst his sweetheart held him close and whispered to him. At last he roused himself and said:—

"Very well—I will do as you say, Marcelle. Since Monsieur Bertillon assures me that they would have been arrested even had I not returned, I may even be helping these wonderful, kindly people, instead of harming them. Such an enterprise as theirs could not last, anyhow. It is too big and noble. Perhaps you will not believe my story. Marcelle has told you why we quarrelled. What with that and the loss, as I then thought, of all my money, I was utterly wretched. I made up my mind to kill myself. It was whilst I was having my last fling in sheer despair that the Hindu Chundah Lal came and sat beside me. He is a marvellous old man. How he managed it I don't rightly recall, but somehow I felt I had to tell him all my troubles. In a short time he knew all about me. At his suggestion I followed him to his car; I didn't want to a bit at first, but there was no resisting his soft purring voice.

"He took me to his house, but I have no idea where it is. We drank some wine and he again asked if I had truly decided to die. I replied that I was quite determined, and he thereupon related that he was the head of an organization called the Euthanasia. The dream of his life was to give men who were failures, or who were in great trouble and tired of life, a fresh start. I cannot hope to convey the impression his soft voice and inspired manner made on me, but that night it seemed like a perfect dream come true. A fresh start—with a new name—in a distant country, and all the past wiped out and forgotten.

"Yes, forgotten, he said. All I needed to do was to swear on my honour never to seek to return to my former personality, even if—as sometimes happened—memories of it floated across my mind. In time these would disappear. He guaranteed that I should receive letters which would procure work for me at once. I should practically

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opposite the old man they called Master and Excellency. His eyes burned into mine. I felt sleepy, everything seemed to become a dream, a pleasant dream, in which I was constantly moving, driving, floating. Once after an accident I had an injection of heroin. Well, it was like that, only more fantastic. Finally, things cleared a little. I heard the slop-slop of water and felt the swing and swoop of a ship. I smelt the salt tang of the ocean. And then abruptly I realized that my dream was a reality; I was truly on a vessel at sea. I had that terrible feeling one sometimes has on the instant of waking from deep sleep. I could neither remember who I was nor where I was. For a long time I went feverishly through the trunk in my cabin, examined my clothes, read my papers, and looked at myself in the mirror. Little by little I grew calm. I was Jules Vernier—French-Canadian, born in Montreal. An inward voice seemed to be telling me all these things. I had been away—and very ill, and was now returning. It must sound incredible, I know; it does to me now. Yet somehow I never doubted the evidence of the documents and letters of introduction in my pocket. There were times when I was on the eve of remembering something, but I could not even think what it was I wished to remember.

MEMORY RETURNS.

"SO I arrived and called on the man for whom I had a letter in Quebec. He gave me a job. It was during the second week after I had started work—he was an importer of French goods—that I read in a Paris paper of the disappearance of Etienne Lafontaine, and how the shares he thought worthless had suddenly soared to an incredible price—and like a flash of lightning on a dark night my past returned. I knew who I was and remembered what had happened. The Hindu had kept his word. He had given me a fresh start, and, but for a freak of chance, I should have little by little settled down as Jules Vernier. How it was done I cannot say. Some Eastern drug and hypnotism or magic, perhaps. Even now the days which elapsed between that dinner and my awakening on board ship are but fragments of a strange dream. So strong was the spell that for a long time after the first shock of recovering my memory was past my two personalities overlapped. There were moments when I felt convinced I was truly Vernier and that I was suffering from delusions and only imagined I had once been Lafontaine. When this happened I thought of my sweet Marcelle. Her image and my love finally triumphed.

"However, it was one thing to desire a return to the past and quite another to put it into practice. I had but little money and no papers except those of Jules Vernier; and I was watched. Not openly; but I had a feeling that agents of this Euthanasia organization were keeping me constantly under observation. Someone watched me at my lodging-house, at work, and even in *cafés* and restaurants. I recalled what Chundah Lal had said:—

"'Those who break faith with us—should the past ever rise from the shadows of memory—die.'

"Now that I was rich and could marry my Marcelle I had no wish to die. I had tasted the Oriental's uncanny power and grew afraid. For days I tortured my brain with the puzzle how to obtain the money I needed. Then I remembered a good friend of mine in London. We had been at school together, and had made a boyish vow to help each other if ever need arose. There was even a nickname which we had agreed upon for just such an emergency. I sent him an urgent cable asking for five thousand francs. Twelve hours later I received the money in the name of Vernier.

"My journey from Canada to New York was uneventful. But I had a shock when I arrived there. Two dark foreign men spoke to me as I left the station, and asked if I was Jules Vernier. I could not shake them off. Then I hit on the plan of disguising myself as a woman. Instead of taking a boat in New York, I went to Boston. I left the ship in Cherbourg, still dressed as an old woman. I saw the men who were watching for me, and realized they would not hesitate to kill me. After all, they had faithfully carried out their share—and their risks must be great. I decided to meet Marcelle secretly and fly with her to England—and so you caught me. Thank God it was not Chundah Lal."

For a long time after Lafontaine had concluded his strange tale we remained silent. Scepticism struggled with the slowly growing conviction that what we had heard was true. I remembered our visit to Versailles and the uncanny eyes of the Indian.

THE WEB CLOSES ROUND CHUNDAH LAL.

SUDDENLY Bertillon turned to Dufresne.

"Call your men off at once. I hope it is not too late. We must not arrest anyone as yet. Set a watch, but whatever you do, avoid alarming these people. It's our only hope of finding out what has become of those others. God knows under what names and in what part of the world they

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are. That is what has happened to your Americans, Monsieur Bannister," he added, as Dufresne dashed waay.

" Calder had appropriated his client's money, and Hellor had become entangled with a woman. And there is Cottin, the jeweller. They all had their fresh start. That bloodstained taxi was faked to make us believe the passengers and drivers had been murdered. Lebrun informed me to-day that it is not human blood. It explains Lastolle's wrecked car also. He is another of their victims. What a scheme! What a diabolical scheme! Think what it means to men who are in trouble to be offered a clean slate and a fresh start. Such men are not likely to complain, even if their memory should return. Take our friend here. One hundred thousand francs he paid over—and in exchange? Forged papers, some clothes—a bit of hypnotism and his fare. Fine profits, eh? They must have agents all over the world. The organization has been flourishing for years, and fortunately they have become careless, but I don't see yet what the law can do. Judges and jury would laugh at us. Furthermore, their victims consent and they receive what they bargain for." Here Bertillon thumped the table angrily. " Philanthropy, indeed! Fortunately some, like the banker, were wanted on a warrant; so our Hindu friend is conspiring to defeat the ends of justice. That's about the only charge we can bring."

" By Jove!" Etienne Lafontaine interposed. " I had never thought of it like that. You mean they are crooks? That fine story of helping unfortunates? "

Bertillon smiled grimly.

" Be sure they only pick those who can pay well. They had in some cases to obtain bodies so that we should believe the missing man to be dead. Probably that consumptive died in some hovel and they bought his remains. He was to take your place, Monsieur Lafontaine. Rather crude that last—but criminals always underrate our intelligence. By the way, did you send two cheques to your friend in London? "

" No, monsieur, only one, ten thousand francs."

My chief placed the two cheques the bank had sent before Lafontaine. " Then whence comes this one for fifty thousand, cashed by a Paris firm? "

The young man examined it perplexedly.

" I cannot say. It is my signature, but unless I signed it whilst unconscious I cannot explain it."

Bertillon nodded. " Probably you did. They knew you had money, and cashed this when they received news of your return. It is the first time in all my experience that hypnotism has been put to practical use."

THE door opened, and Dufresne entered, flushed and breathless.

" Just in time. Colbert was about to raid both houses. What do you intend to do now? "

Bertillon looked at the girl, who until then had remained silent.

" Take him to London at once, Miss O'Connor. He is in grave danger in France. Get married quietly and spend your honeymoon in England. It is only a matter of weeks before we capture this gang, I'll promise you that. Until you go, two detectives shall constantly guard you. I'll wish you good night now. We have much to do."

By morning telephone and telegraph had spread a net around France through which it would be hard for the Euthanasia association to break. Every railway line and every harbour was watched and foreign police headquarters were warned to co-operate. We sought our beds at last tired out, but for me sleep was long in coming. I knew that soon we should have to prepare for a duel to the death with clever and ruthless criminals of a type I had never as yet encountered. When we gathered again in Bertillon's office the next evening I had the satisfaction of knowing that Etienne Lafontaine and his pretty betrothed had arrived safely in England and would henceforth be protected from harm by our British colleagues.

The amazing case described in the foregoing article was officially reported in the *Journal des Procès en Correctionnelle*, December to February, 1913-1914.

(Next month: Chundah Lal at Bay.")

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"Dayspring Mishandled"

By

RUDYARD KIPLING

Illustrated by
C. E. BROCK, R.I.

C'est moi, c'est moi, c'est moi !
Je suis la Mandragore !
La fille des beaux jours qui s'éveillé à
l'aurore—
Et qui chante pour toi !

IN the days beyond compare and before the Judgment, a genius called Graydon foresaw that the advance of education and the standard of living would submerge all mind-marks in one mudrush of standardized reading-matter, and created the Fictional Supply Syndicate to meet the demand.

Since a few days' work for him brought them more money than a week's elsewhere, he drew many young men (some now eminent) into his employ. He bade them keep their eyes on the Sixpenny Dream Book, the Army and Navy Stores Catalogue (this for backgrounds as they changed), and *The Hearthstone Friend*, a weekly publication which specialized unrivalledly in the domestic emotions. Yet, even so, youth would not be denied, and some of the collaborated love-talk in "Passion Hath Peril," and "Eva's Lost Lovers," and the account of the murder of the Earl in "The Wickwire Tragedies"—to name but a few masterpieces now never mentioned for fear of blackmail—was as good as anything to which their authors signed their real names in more distinguished years.

Among the young ravens driven to roost awhile in Graydon's ark was James Andrew Manallace—a darkish, slow northerner of the type that does not ignite, but must be detonated. Given written or verbal outlines of a plot, he was useless; but, with a half-dozen pictures to write his story round, he could astonish.

And he adored that woman who afterwards became the mother of Vidal Benzaquen,* and who suffered and died because she loved one unworthy of her. There was, also, among the company a mannered, heavy person called Alured Costerley, who talked and wrote about "Bohemia," but was always afraid of being "compromised" by the weekly suppers at Neminaka's in Hestern Square, where the Syndicate work was apportioned, and where everyone looked out for himself. He, too, for a time, loved Vidal's mother, in his own way.

Now, one Saturday at Neminaka's, Graydon, who had given Manallace a sheaf of prints—torn from an extinct children's book called "Philippa's Queen"—on which to improvise, asked for the results. Manallace went down into his ulster-pocket, hesitated a moment, and said the stuff had turned into poetry on his hands.

"Bosh!" Graydon said.

"That's what it *isn't*," the boy retorted. "It's rather good."

"Then it's no use to *us*." Graydon laughed. "Have you brought the cuts back?"

Manallace handed them over. There was a castle in the series; a knight or so in armour; an old lady in a horned headdress; a young ditto; a very obvious Hebrew; a clerk, with pen and inkhorn, checking wine-barrels on a wharf; and a

* "The Village that voted the Earth was Flat."

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Crusader. On the back of one of them was a note, " If he doesn't want to go, why can't he be captured and held to ransom ? " Graydon asked what it meant.

" I don't know yet. A comic opera, perhaps," said Manallace.

Graydon, who seldom wasted time, passed the cuts on to someone else, advanced Manallace a couple of sovereigns to carry on with, as usual, at which Costerley was angry and would have said something unpleasant but was suppressed. Half-way through supper, Costerley told the company that a relative had died and left him an independence ; and he now withdrew from " hackwork " to follow " literature." Generally, the Syndicate rejoiced in a comrade's good fortune, but Costerley had gifts of waking dislike. So the news was received with a vote of thanks, and he went out before the end, and, it was said, proposed to 'Dal Benzaquen's mother, who refused him ; and he did not come back. Manallace, who had arrived a little exalted, got so drunk before midnight that a man had to stay and see him home. But liquor never touched him above the waist, and when he had slept awhile, he recited to the gas-chandelier the poetry he had made out of the pictures ; said that, on second thoughts, he would convert it into comic opera ; deplored the Upas-tree influence of Gilbert and Sullivan ; sang somewhat to illustrate his point ; and—after some words, by the way, with a negress in yellow satin—was coaxed to his rooms.

In the course of a few years, Graydon's forethought and genius were rewarded. The public began to read and reason upon higher planes, and the Syndicate made money. Later still, people demanded of their printed matter what they expected in their clothing and furniture. So, precisely as the three guinea hand-bag is followed in three weeks by its thirteen and sevenpence ha'penny, indistinguishable sister, they enjoyed perfect synthetic substitutes for Letters, Art, Sentiment, and Emotion. Graydon died, alas ! before the Cinema-caption school came in, when, doubtless, he would have led the new dawn ; but he left his widow twenty-seven thousand pounds.

Manallace, to his own surprise, made a reputation, and, more important, money for Vidal's mother when her husband ran away and the first symptoms of her paralysis showed. His line was the jocundly-sentimental Wardour Street brand of adventure, told in a style that exactly met, but never exceeded, every expectation.

As he once said when urged to " write a book " : " I've got my label, and I'm not going to chew it off. If you save people thinking, you can do anything with anyone." But, his works apart, he was genuinely a man of letters. He rented a small cottage in the country and economized on everything, except Vidal's mother.

COSTERLEY flew higher. When his legacy freed him from " hackwork," he became first a critic—in which calling he loyally scalped all his old associates as they came up—and then, marrying a little money, looked for some speciality which would not lay him open to too much criticism. Having found it (Chaucer was the prey), he consolidated his position before he occupied it, by his careful speech, his cultivated bearing, and the whispered words of his friends whom he had saved the trouble of thinking. It followed that when he published his first serious articles on Chaucer, all that world which is interested in Chaucer said : " This is an authority on Chaucer." But, he was no impostor. He learned and knew his poet, and the age ; and in a month-long dogfight in an austere literary weekly, met and mangled the recognized Chaucer expert of the day. He also, " for old sake's sake," as he wrote to a friend, went out of his way to review one of Manallace's books with an intimacy of unclean deduction (this was before the days of Freud) which long stood as a record. Some member of the extinct Syndicate took occasion to ask him if he would not—for old sake's sake—help Vidal's mother to a new treatment. He answered that he had " known the lady very slightly and the calls on his purse were so heavy that," etc. The writer showed the letter to Manallace, who said he was glad Costerley hadn't interfered. Vidal's mother was then wholly paralysed. Only her eyes could move, and those always looked for the husband who had left her. She died thus in Manallace's arms in April of the year of the War.

During the War he and Costerley worked as some sort of Departmental dishwashers in the Office of Co-ordinated Supervisals. Here Manallace came to know Costerley again. Costerley, having a sweet tooth, cadged lumps of sugar for his tea from a typist, and when she took to giving them to a younger man, arranged that she should be reported for smoking in unauthorized apartments. Manallace possessed himself of every detail of the affair, as compensation for the review of his book. Then there came a night when, waiting for a big air-raid, the two men had talked humanly, and Manallace spoke of Vidal's mother. Costerley said something in reply, and from that hour—as it was learned several years later—Manallace's real life-work and interests began.

The War over, Costerley set about to make himself Supreme Pontiff on Chaucer

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by methods not far removed from the employment of poison-gas. The English Pope was silent, through private griefs, and influenza had carried off the learned Hun who claimed Continental allegiance. Thus Costerley crowed unchallenged from Upsala to Seville, while Manallace went back to his cottage with the photo of Vidal's mother over the mantelpiece. She seemed to have emptied out his life, and left him only fleeting interests in trifles. His private diversions were experiments of uncertain outcome, which, he said, rested him after a day's gadzooking and vitalstapping. I found him, for instance, one week-end, in his toolshed-scullery, boiling a brew of slimy barks which were, if mixed with oak-galls, vitriol and wine, to become an ink-powder. We boiled it till the Monday, and it turned into an adhesive stronger than birdlime, and entangled us both.

At other times, he would carry me off, once in a few weeks, to sit at Costerley's feet, and hear him talk about Chaucer. Costerley's voice, bad enough in youth, when it could be shouted down, had with culture and tact grown almost insupportable. His mannerisms, too, had multiplied and set. He minced, mouthed and postured, and chewed his words throughout those terrible evenings; and by mere gesticulation poisoned not only Chaucer, but every shred of English literature which he used to embellish him. He was shameless, too, as regarded self-advertisement and "recognition"—weaving elaborate intrigues; forming petty friendships and confederacies, to be dissolved next week in favour of more promising alliances; fawning, snubbing, lecturing, organizing and lying as unrestingly as a politician, in chase of the Knighthood due not to him (he always called on his Maker to forbid such a thought) but as tribute to Chaucer. Yet, sometimes, he could break from his obsession and prove how a man's work will try to save the soul of him. He would tell us charmingly of copyists of the fifteenth century in England and the Low Countries, who had multiplied the Chaucer MSS., of which there remained—he gave us the exact number—and how each scribe could by him (and, he implied, by him alone) be distinguished from every other by some peculiarity of letter-formation, spacing or like trick of pen-work; and how he could fix the dates of their work within five years. Sometimes he would give us half an hour of this really interesting stuff and then return to his overdue "recognition." The changes sickened me, but Manallace defended him, as a master in his own line who had revealed Chaucer to at least one grateful soul.

This, as far as I remembered, was the autumn when Manallace holidayed in the Shetlands or the Faroes, and came back with a stone "quern"—a hand corn-grinder. He said it interested him from the ethnological standpoint. His whim lasted till next harvest, and was followed by a religious spasm which, naturally, translated itself into literature. He showed me a battered and mutilated Vulgate of 1485, patched up the back with bits of legal parchments, which he had bought for thirty-five shillings. Some monk's attempt to rubricate chapter initials had caught his forlorn fancy, and he dabbled in shells of gold and silver paint for weeks.

That also faded out, and he went to the Continent to get local colour for a love-story, about Alva and the Dutch, and, the next year or so I saw practically nothing of him. This released me from seeing much of Costerley, but, at intervals, I would go there to dine with him, when his wife—an unappetizing, ash-coloured woman with one side of her face out of drawing—made no secret that his friends wearied her almost as much as he did. But at a later meeting, not long after Manallace had finished his Low Countries' novel, I found Costerley charged to bursting-point with triumph and high informations hardly withheld. He confided to me that a time was at hand when great matters would be made plain, and "recognition" would be inevitable. I assumed, naturally, that there was a fresh scandal or heresy afoot in Chaucer circles, and kept my curiosity within bounds.

IN time, New York cabled that a fragment of a hitherto unknown Canterbury Tale lay safe in the steel-walled vaults of the seven million dollar Sunnapia Collection. It was news on an international scale—the New World exultant—the Old deploring the "burden of British taxation which drove such treasures, etc.," and the lighter-minded journals disporting themselves according to their publics; for "our Dan," as one earnest Sunday editor observed, "lies closer to the national heart than we wot of." Common decency made me call on Costerley, who, to my surprise, had not yet descended into the arena. I found him, made young again by joy, deep in just-passed proofs.

"Yes," he said, it was all true. He had, of course, been in it from the first. There had been found one hundred and fifteen new lines of Chaucer tacked on to an abridged end of "The Persone's Tale," the whole the work of Abraham Mentzius, better known as Mentzel of Antwerp (1388–1438/9)—I might remember he had talked about him—whose distinguishing peculiarities were a certain Byzantine formation of his g's, the

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use of a " sickle-nibbed " reed-pen, which cut markedly into the vellum at certain letters ; and, above all, a tendency to spell English words on Dutch lines, whereof the manuscript carried one convincing proof. For instance (he wrote it out for me) a girl praying against an undesired marriage, says :—

" *Ah Jesu-Moder, pitie my o peyne.*
Daiespringe mishandeelt cometh nat agayne."

Would I, please, note the spelling of " mishandeelt " ? Stark Dutch and Mentzel's besetting sin ! But in *his* position one took nothing for granted. The page had been part of the stiffening of the side of an old Vulgate, bought in a parcel by Dredd, the big dealer, because it had some rubricated chapter-initials, and by Dredd shipped, with a consignment of similar odds and ends, to the Sunnapia Collection, where they were making a glass-cased exhibit of the whole history of illumination and did not care how many books they gutted for that purpose. There, someone who noticed a crack in the back of the Vulgate had unearthed it. He went on : " They didn't know what to make of the thing at first. But they had heard of *me !* They kept quiet till I'd been consulted. You might have noticed I was out of England for three months.

" I WAS over there, of course. It was what is called a ' spoil '—a page Mentzel had spoiled with his Dutch spelling—I expect he had had the English dictated to him—then had evidently used the vellum for trying out his reeds ; and then, I suppose, had put it away. The ' spoil ' had been doubled, pasted together, and slipped in as stiffening to this old book-cover. I had it steamed open, and analyzed the wash. It gave the flour-grains in the paste—coarse, because of the old millstones—and there were traces of the stone itself. What ? Oh, possibly a handmill of Mentzel's own time. He may have doubled the spoilt page and used it for part of a pad to steady woodcuts on. It may have lain about his workshop for years. That, indeed, is practically certain because a beginner from the Low Countries has tried his reed on a few lines of some monkish hymn—not a bad lilt tho' — which must have been common form. Oh yes, the page may have been used in other books before it was used for the Vulgate. That doesn't matter, but *this* does. Listen ! I took a wash, for analysis, from a blot in one corner—that would be after Mentzel had given up trying to make a possible page of it, and had grown careless — and I got the actual *ink* of the period ! It's a practically eternal stuff compounded on—I've forgotten his name for the minute—the scribe at Bury St. Edmunds, of course—hawthorn-bark and wine. Anyhow, on *his* formula. *That* wouldn't interest you either, but, taken with all the other testimony, it clinches the thing. (You'll see it all in my Statement to the Press on Monday.) Overwhelming, isn't it ? "

" Overwhelming," I said, with sincerity. " Tell me what the tale was about, though. That's more in my line."

" I know it ; but *I* have to be equipped on all sides. The verses are relatively easy for one to pronounce on. The freshness, the fun, the humanity, the fragrance of it all, cries—no, shouts—itself as Dan's work. Why ' Daiespringe mishandeelt ' alone stamps it from Dan's mint. Plangent as doom, my dear boy—plangent as doom ! It's all in my Statement. Well, substantially, the fragment deals with a girl whose parents wish her to marry an elderly suitor. The mother isn't so keen on it, but the father, an old Knight, is. The girl, of course, is in love with a younger and a poorer man. Common form ? Granted. Then the father, who doesn't in the least want to, is ordered off to a Crusade and, by way of passing on the kick, as we used to say during the War, orders the girl to be kept in duresse till his return or her consent to the old suitor. Common form, again ? Quite so. That's too much for her mother. She reminds the old Knight of his age and infirmities, and the discomforts of Crusading. Are you sure I'm not boring you ? "

" Not at all," I said, though time had begun to whirl backward through my brain to a red-velvet, pomatum-scented side-room at Neminaka's and Manallace's set face intoning to the gas.

" You'll read it all in my Statement next week. The sum is that the old lady tells him of a certain Knight-adventurer on the French coast, who, for a consideration, waylays Knights who don't relish crusading and holds them to impossible ransoms till the trooping-season is over, or they are returned sick. He keeps a ship in the Channel to pick 'em up and transfers his birds to his castle ashore, where he has a reputation for doing 'em well. As the old lady points out :—

" ' And if perchance thou fall into his honde
By God how canstow ride to Holilonde ? '

" You see ? Modern in essence as Gilbert and Sullivan, but handled as only Dan could. And she reminds him that ' Honour and olde bones ' parted company long ago. He makes one splendid appeal for the spirit of knighthood :—

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" ' Lat all men change as Fortune may send,
But Knighthood beareth service to the end,'

and *then*, of course, he gives in :—

" ' For what his woman willeth to be don
Her manne must or wauken Hell anon.'

" Then she hints that the daughter's young lover, who is in the Bordeaux wine-trade, could open negotiations for a kidnapping without compromising him. And *then* that careless brute Mentzel spoils his page and chucks it ! But there's enough to show what's going to happen. You'll see it all in my Statement. Isn't it immense ? Was there ever anything in literary finds to hold a candle to it ? . . . And they give grocers Knighthoods for selling cheese ! "

I ESCAPED before he could get into his stride on that course : for I wanted to think, and to see Manallace. But I waited till Costerley's Statement came out. He had left himself no loophole. And when, a little later, his (nominally the Sunnapia people's) " scientific " account of their analyses and tests appeared, criticism ceased, and some journals began to demand " public recognition." Manallace wrote me on this subject, and I went down to the Cottage, where he at once asked me to sign a Memorial on Costerley's behalf. With luck, he said, we might even get him a K.B.E. in the next Honours List. Had I read the Statement ?

" I have," I replied. " But I want to ask you something first. Do you remember the night you got drunk at Neminaka's, and I stayed behind to look after you ? "

" Oh, *that* time," said he, pondering. " Wait a minute ! I remember Graydon advancing me two quid. He was a generous paymaster. And I remember—now, who the deuce rolled me under the sofa—and what for ? "

" We all did," I replied. " You wanted to read us what you'd written to those Chaucer cuts."

" I don't remember that. No ! 'Fraid I don't remember anything after the sofa-episode. . . . *You* always said that you took me home—didn't you ? "

" I did, and you told Kentucky Kate outside the old Empire that you had been faithful, Cynera, in your fashion."

" Did I ? " said he. " My God ! Well, I suppose I have." He stared into the fire. " What else ? "

" After you woke up, you recited me what you had made out of the cuts—the whole tale ! So—you see ! "

" Ye-es, I see." He nodded. " What are you going to do about it ? "

" What are *you ?* "

" I'm going to help him get his Knighthood—first."

" Why ? "

" I'll tell you what he said about Dal's mother—the night there was that air-raid on Whitehall."

He told it.

" That's why," he said. " Am I justified ? "

He seemed to me entirely so.

" But after he gets his Knighthood ? " I went on.

" That depends. There are several things I can think of. It interests me."

" Good Heavens ! I've always imagined you a man without interests."

" So I was. I owe my interests to Costerley. He gave me every one of 'em except the tale itself."

" How did *that* come ? "

" Something in those ghastly cuts touched off something in me—a sort of possession, I suppose. I was in love too. No wonder I got drunk that night. I'd *been* Chaucer for a week ! Then I thought the notion might make a comic opera. But Gilbert and Sullivan were too strong."

" So I remember you told me at the time."

" I kept it by me, and it made me interested in Chaucer — philologically and so on. I worked on it on that line for years. There wasn't a flaw in the wording even in '14. I've hardly had to touch it after that."

" Did you ever tell it to anyone except me ? "

" No, only Dal's mother—when she could listen to anything—to put her to sleep. But when Costerley said—what he did about her, I thought I might use it. 'Twasn't difficult. *He* taught me. D'you remember my birdlime experiments, and the stuff on our hands ? I'd been trying to get that ink for more than a year. Costerley told me where I'd find the formula. And your falling over the quern, too ? "

" That accounted for the stone-dust under the microscope ? "

" Yes. I grew the wheat in the garden here, and ground it myself. Costerley gave me Mentzel complete. He put me on to an MS. in the British Museum which he said was the finest sample of his work. I copied his Byzantine g's for months."

" And what's a ' sickle-slanted ' pen ? " I asked.

" You nick one edge of your reed till it drags and scratches on the curves of the letters. Costerley told me about Mentzel's spacing and margining. I only had to get the hang of his script."

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Vulgate was begun after a long course of amateur bookbinding. At last, he bedded it under pieces of an old deed, and a printed page (1786) of Horace's Odes, legitimately

used for repairs by different owners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and at the last moment, to meet Costerley's theory that spoiled pages were used in workshops by beginners, he had written a few Latin words in fifteenth century script—the Statement gave the exact date—across an open part of the fragment. The thing ran: "*Illa alma Mater ecca, secum afferens me acceptum. Nicolaus Atrib.*" The disposal of the thing was easiest of all. He had merely hung about Dredd's dark bookshop of fifteen rooms, where he was well known, occasionally buying but generally browsing, till, one day, Dredd Senior showed him a case of cheap black-letter stuff, English and Continental—being packed for the Sunnapia people—into which Manallace tucked his contribution, taking care to wrench the back enough to give a lead to an earnest seeker.

"And then?" I demanded.

"After six months or so Costerley sent for me. Sunnapia had found it, and as Dredd had missed it, and there was no money-motive sticking out, they were half convinced it was genuine from the start. But they invited him over. He conferred with their 'experts,' and suggested the scientific tests. *I* put that into his head, before he sailed. That's all. And now, will you sign the Memorial?"

I signed. Before we had finished hawking it round there was a host of influential names to help us, as well as the impetus of all the literary discussions which arose over every detail of the glorious trove. The upshot was a K.B.E. for Costerley in the next Honours List; and Lady Costerley, her cards duly printed, called on friends that same afternoon.

Manallace invited me to come with him, a day or so later, to convey our pleasure and satisfaction to them both. We were rewarded by the sight of a man relaxed and ungirt—not to say wallowing naked—on the crest of life's success. He assured us that "The Title" should not make any difference to our future relations, seeing it was in no sense personal, but, as he had often said, a tribute to Chaucer, "and, after all," he pointed out, with a glance at the mirror over the mantelpiece, "Chaucer was the prototype of the 'veray parfit gentil Knight' of the British Empire so far as it then existed."

On the way back, Manallace told me he was considering either an unheralded revelation in the baser Press which should bring Costerley's universe crashing on his head some breakfast-time, or a private conversation, reasons given, when he would make clear to Costerley that he must now back the forgery as long as he lived, under threat of Manallace's betraying it if he flinched.

He favoured the second plan. "If I pull the string of the shower-bath in the papers," he said, "Costerley might go off his veray parfit gentil nut. I want to keep his intellect."

"What about your own position? The forgery doesn't matter so much. But if you tell this you'll kill him," I said.

"I intend that. Oh—my position? I've been dead since—April, Fourteen, it was—going on for twelve years now. But there's no hurry. What was it *she* was saying to you just as we left?"

"She told me how much your sympathy and understanding had meant to him. She said she thought that even Alured did not realize the full extent of his obligations to you."

"She's right, but I don't like her putting it that way."

"It's only common form—as Costerley's always saying."

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"Not with *her*. She can hear a man think."

"She never struck me in that light."

"*You* aren't playing against her."

"Guilty conscience, Manallace."

"H'm! I wonder. Mine or hers? I *wish* she hadn't said that.

"'More even than *he* realizes it.' I won't call again for awhile."

He kept away till we read that Sir Alured, owing to slight indisposition, had been unable to attend a dinner given in his honour.

Inquiries brought word that it was but natural reaction, after strain, which, for the moment, took the form of nervous dyspepsia, and he would be glad to see Manallace at any time. Manallace reported him as rather pulled and drawn, but full of his new life and position, and proud that his efforts should have martyred him so much. He was going to collect, collate and expand all his pronouncements and inferences into one authoritative volume.

"I must make an effort of my own," said Manallace. "I've collected nearly all his stuff about the Find that has appeared in the papers, and he's promised me everything that's missing. I'm going to help him. It will be a fresh interest."

"How will you treat it?" I asked.

"I expect I shall quote his deductions on the evidence, and parallel 'em with my experiments—the ink and the paste and the rest of it. It ought to be rather interesting."

"But even then there will only be your word. It's hard to catch up with an established lie," I said. "Especially when you've started it yourself."

He laughed. "I've arranged for *that*—in case anything happens to me. Do you remember the 'Latin Hymn'?"*

"Surely. There's quite a literature about it already."

"Well, you write those ten words above each other, and read down the first and second letters of 'em; and see what you get. My Banker has the formula."

He wrapped himself lovingly and leisurely round his new task, and Costerley was as good as his word in giving him help. The two practically collaborated, for Manallace suggested that all Costerley's strictly scientific evidence should be in one place, with his deductions and dithyrambs as appendices. He assured him that the public would prefer this arrangement, and, after grave consideration, Costerley agreed.

"That's better," said Manallace to me. "Now I sha'n't have so many hiatuses in my extracts. Dots always give the reader the idea you aren't dealing fairly with your man. I shall merely quote him solid, and rip him up, proof for proof, and date for date, in parallel columns. His book's taking more out of him than I like, though. He's been doubled up twice with tummy attacks since I've worked with him. And he's just the sort of flatulent beast who may go down with appendicitis."

But we learned before long that the attacks were due to gall-stones, which would necessitate an operation. Costerley bore the blow very well. He had full confidence in his surgeon, an old friend of theirs; great faith in his own constitution; a strong conviction that nothing would happen to him till the book was finished, and, above all, the will to live.

He dwelt on these assets with a voice at times a little out of pitch and eyes brighter than usual beside a slightly-sharpening nose.

I HAD only met Gleeag, the surgeon, once or twice at Costerley's house, but had always heard him spoken of as a most capable man. He told Costerley that his trouble was the price exacted, in some shape or other, from all who had served their country; and that, measured in units of strain, Costerley had practically been at the front through those three years he had served in the Department of Co-ordinated Supervisals. However, the thing had been taken betimes, and in a few months he would worry no more about it.

"But suppose he dies?" I suggested to Manallace.

"He won't. I've been talking to Gleeag. He says he's all right."

"Wouldn't Gleeag's talk be common form?"

"I *wish* you hadn't said that. But, surely, Gleeag wouldn't have the face to play with me—or her."

"Why not? I expect it's been done before."

But Manallace insisted that, in this case, it would be impossible.

The operation was a success and, some weeks later, Costerley began to recast the arrangement and most of the material of his book. "Let me have my way," he said, when Manallace protested. "They are making too much of a baby of me. I really don't need Gleeag looking in every day now." But Lady Costerley told us that he required careful watching. His heart had felt the strain; and fret or disappointment of any kind must be avoided. "Even," she

*Illa
alma
Mater
ecca
secum
afferens
me
acceptum
Nicolaus
Atrib.

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turned to Manallace, "though you know ever so much better how his book should be arranged than he does himself."

"But really," Manallace began. "I'm very careful not to fuss——"

She shook her finger at him playfully. "You don't think you do; but remember, he tells me everything that you tell him, just the same as he told me everything that he used to tell *you*. Oh, I don't mean the hours." The man grew more and more difficult to work with, and what check he had heretofore set on his self-praises went altogether.

"He says there has never been anything in the history of Letters to compare with it," Manallace groaned. "He wants now to inscribe—he never dedicates, you know—inscribe it to me, as his 'most valued assistant.' The devil of it is that *she* backs

She shook her finger at him playfully

things that men talk about. I mean about his Chaucer."

"I didn't realize that," said Manallace, weakly.

"I thought you didn't. He never spares *me* anything; but *I* don't mind," she replied with a laugh, and went off to Gleeag, who was paying his daily visit. Gleeag said he had no objection to Manallace working with Costerley on the book for a given time—say, thrice a week—but supported Lady Costerley's demand that he should not be over-taxed in what she called "the sacred him up in getting it out soon. Why? How much do you think she knows?"

"Why should she know anything at all?"

"You heard her say he had told her everything that he had told me about Chaucer? (I *wish* she hadn't said that!) If she puts two and two together, she can't help seeing that every one of his notions and theories has been played up to. But then—but then . . . *Why* is she trying to hurry publication? She talks about *me* fretting him. *She's* at him, all the time, to be quick."

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Costerley must have over-worked, for, after a couple of months, he complained of a stitch in his right side, which Gleeag said was a slight adhesion, an almost inevitable result of the operation. It threw him back awhile, but he returned to his work undefeated.

The book was due in the autumn, summer was passing, and his publisher urgent, and —he said to me, when after a longish interval I called—Manallace had chosen this time, of all, to take his holiday. He was not pleased with Manallace, once his indefatigable aide, but now dilatory, and full of time-wasting objections. Lady Costerley had noticed it, too.

Meantime, with Lady Costerley's help, he himself was doing the best he could to expedite the book; but Manallace had mislaid (did I think through jealousy?) some essential stuff which had been dictated to him. And Lady Costerley wrote Manallace, who had been delayed by a slight motor-accident abroad, that the fret of waiting was prejudicial to her husband's health. Manallace, on his return from the Continent, showed me that letter.

"He has fretted a little, I believe," I said.

Manallace shuddered. "If I stay abroad, I'm helping to kill him. If I help him to hurry up the book, I'm expected to kill him. *She* knows," he said.

"You're mad. You've got this thing on the brain."

"I have *not!* Look here! You remember that Gleeag gave me from four to six, three times a week, to work with him. She called them the 'sacred hours.' You heard her? Well, they *are!* They are Gleeag's and hers. But she's so infernally plain, and I'm such a fool, it took me weeks to find it out."

"That's their affair," I answered. "It doesn't prove she knows anything about the Chaucer."

"She *does*. He told her everything that he had told me when I was pumping him, all those years. She put two and two together when the thing came out. She saw exactly how I had set my traps. I *know* it! She's been trying to make me admit it."

"What did you do?"

"'Didn't understand what she was driving at, of course. And then she asked Gleeag, before me, if he didn't think the delay over the book was fretting Alured. He didn't think so. He said getting it out might deprive him of an interest. He had *that* much decency. *She's* the devil!"

"What do you suppose is her game, then?"

"If Costerley knows he's been had, it'll kill him. She's at me all the time, indirectly, to let it out. I've told you she wants to make it a sort of joke between us. Gleeag's willing to wait. He knows Costerley's a dead man. It slips out when they talk. They say "He was," not "He is." Both of 'em know it. But *she* wants him finished *sooner*."

"I don't believe it. What are you going to do?"

"What can I? I'm not going to have him killed, though."

Manlike, he invented compromises whereby Costerley might be lured up by-paths of interest, to delay publication. This was not a success. As autumn advanced Costerley fretted more, and suffered from return of his distressing colics. At last, Gleeag told him that he thought they might be due to an overlooked gallstone working down. A second comparatively trivial operation would eliminate this bother once and for all. If Costerley cared for another opinion, Gleeag named a surgeon of eminence. "And then," said he, cheerily, "the two of us can talk you over." Costerley did not want to be talked over. He was oppressed by pains in his right side, which, at first, had yielded to the liver-tonics Gleeag prescribed; but now they stayed—like a toothache—behind everything. He felt most at ease in his bedroom study, with his proofs around him. If he had more pain than he could stand, he would consider the second operation. Meantime Manallace—"the meticulous Manallace," he called him—agreed with him in thinking that the Mentzel page-facsimile, done by the Sunnapia Library, was not quite good enough for the great book, and the Sunnapia people were, very decently, having it re-processed. This would hold things back till early spring, which had its advantages, for he could run a fresh eye over all in the interval.

One gathered these news in the course of stray visits as the days shortened. He insisted on Manallace keeping to the "sacred hours," and Manallace insisted on my accompanying him when possible. On these occasions he and Costerley would confer apart for half an hour or so, while I listened to an unendurable clock in the drawing-room. Then I would join them and help wear out the rest of the time, while Costerley rambled. His speech, now, was often clouded and uncertain—the result of the "liver-tonics"; and his face came to look like old vellum.

IT was a few days after Christmas—the operation was proposed for the following Friday—that we called together. She met us with word that Alured had picked up an irritating little winter cough, due to a cold wave, but we were not, therefore, to abridge our visit. We found him in steam perfumed with Friar's Balsam. He waved

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the old Sunnapia facsimile at us. We agreed that it ought to have been more worthy. He took a dose of his mixture, lay back and asked us to lock the door. There was, he whispered, something wrong somewhere. He could not lay his finger on it, but it was in the air. He felt he was being played with. He did not like it. There was something wrong all round him. Had we noticed it? Manallace and I severally and slowly denied that we had noticed anything of the sort.

With no longer break than a light fit of coughing, he fell into the hideous, helpless panic of the sick—those worse than captives who lie at the judgment and mercy of the hale for every office and hope. He wanted to go away. Would we help him to pack his Gladstone? Or, if that would attract too much attention in certain quarters, help him to dress and go out. There was an urgent matter to be set right; and now that he had The Title and knew his own mind it would all end happily and he would be well again. *Please* would we let him go out, just to speak to—he named her; he named her by her "little" name out of the old days? Manallace quite agreed, and recommended a pull at the "liver-tonic" to brace him after so long in the house. He took it, and Manallace suggested that it would be better if, after his walk, he came down to the cottage for a week-end and brought the revise with him. They could then re-touch the last chapter. He answered to that drug and to the drug of his work, and presently simpered drowsily. Yes, it *was* good—though he said it who should not. He praised himself awhile till, with a puzzled forehead and shut eyes, he told us that *she* had been saying lately that it was too good—the whole thing, if we understood, was *too* good. He wished us to get the exact shade of her meaning. She had suggested, or rather implied, this doubt. She had said—he would let us draw our own inferences—that the Chaucer find had "anticipated the wants of humanity." Johnson, of course. No need to tell *him* that. But what the Hell was her implication? Oh God! Life had always been one long innuendo! *And* she had said that a man could do anything with anyone if he saved him the trouble of thinking. What did she mean by that? *He* had never shirked thought. He had thought sustainedly all his life. It *wasn't* too good, was it? Manallace didn't think it was too good—did he? But this pick-pick-picking at a man's brain and work was too bad, wasn't it? *What* did she mean? Why did she always bring in Manallace, who was only a friend—no scholar but a lover of the game—Eh?—Manallace could confirm this if he were here, instead of loafing on the Continent just when he was needed.

"I've come back," Manallace interrupted, unsteadily. "I can confirm every word you've said. You've nothing to worry about. It's *your* find—*your* credit—*your* glory and—all the rest of it."

"Swear you'll tell her so then," said Costerley. "She doesn't believe a word I say. She told me she never has. Promise!"

Manallace promised, and Costerley added that he had named him his literary executor, the proceeds of the book to go to his wife. "All profits without deduction," he gasped. "Big sales if it's properly handled. *You* don't need money. Graydon'll trust *you* to any extent. It 'ud be a long . . ."

He coughed, and, as he caught breath, his pain broke through all the drugs, and his outcry filled the room. Manallace rose to fetch Gleeag, when a full, high, affected voice, unheard for a generation, accompanied, as it seemed, the clamour of the beast in agony, saying: "I wish to God someone would stop that old swine howling down there! *I* can't. I was going to tell you fellows that it would be a dam' long time before Graydon advanced *me* two quid."

WE escaped together, and found Gleeag waiting, with Lady Costerley, on the landing. He telephoned me, next morning, that Costerley had died of bronchitis, which his weak state made it impossible for him to throw off. "Perhaps it's just as well," he added, in reply to the condolences I asked him to convey to the widow. "We might have come across something we couldn't have coped with."

Distance from that house made me bold.

"You knew all along, I suppose. What was it, really?"

"Malignant kidney-trouble—generalized at the end. 'No use worrying him about it. We let him through as easily as possible. Yes! A happy release. . . . What? . . . Oh! Cremation, Friday, at eleven."

There, then, Manallace and I met. He told me that she had asked him whether the book need now be published; and he had told her this was more than ever necessary, in her interests as well as Costerley's.

"She is going to be known as his widow—for a while, at any rate. Did I perjure myself with him?"

"Not explicitly," I answered.

"Well, I have now—with *her*—explicitly," said he, and took out the black gloves. . . .

As, on the appointed words, the coffin crawled sideways through the noiselessly-closing door-flaps, I saw Lady Costerley's eyes turn towards Gleeag.

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THE OLYMPIC GAMES

What Are Our Chances?

A COMPARISON BETWEEN BRITISH AND FOREIGN CHAMPIONS

By F. A. M. WEBSTER

THE Ninth Olympiad takes place at Amsterdam in July and August. German athletes will be competing for the first time since the War, while the picked representatives of other nations, particularly Great Britain, Finland, France, and Hungary, have shown such startling improvement that the athletic ascendancy of the United States of America will again be sternly challenged. Great Britain will certainly play her part in splitting up the points, and it is of the greatest interest to every class of Briton to know what men our own will have to meet and what chances we have of overcoming the foreign champions, the records of whose performances and triumphs have been especially gathered for THE STRAND MAGAZINE. The author has seen most of the records established and knows all the British and many of the foreign champions personally.

AMERICA

THE modern Olympic Games came into being at Athens in 1896. Of the standard athletic events in that year America won 7, Great Britain 2, and Greece 1; in 1900 America took 13, England 2, and France and Hungary 1 each. At the subsequent Olympiads America won 14 firsts in 1908 and 13 in 1912. At Antwerp in 1920, however, America's monopoly was broken and, but for the inclusion of a 56lb. weight-slinging event, the States would have had to be content to tie with Finland. Then came the second Paris Olympiad in 1924. America won but one individual event upon the track, and only the super-excellence of her field events men and hurdlers saved her from suffering defeat.

Among those Americans who already have broken world's records will be H. de Hart Hubbard, Sabin W. Carr, Glen Hartranft, Roland Locke, and Johnny Gibson. Other world-beaters such as Charles Paddock and Jackson Scholz, sprinters; Lloyd Hahn, middle-distance runner; H. M. Osborn, high jumper, and Clarence Houser, discus thrower and shot putter, may, or may not, "make the team," as they say in the States.

H. DE HART HUBBARD
(Long Jumper).

DE HART HUBBARD, now in his twenty-fifth year, is a quiet, unassuming little fellow, diminutive in stature, mercurial in temperament, but possessed of abounding self-confidence. At the Paris Olympiad Hubbard had the misfortune to strain a thigh muscle, and, although winning at 24ft. 5 1-10in., he was denied the world's record.

Nothing daunted, Hubbard returned to the States and resumed serious training as soon as his leg was fit, and in September, 1927, jumped the amazing distance of 26ft. 2in. This record, however, was not allowed, on the grounds that the surface of the sand-pit was one inch lower than the height of the take-off board. He is not only confident that he will, at Amsterdam, eclipse the Olympic record of 24ft. 11¼in., which has stood to the credit of A. L. Gutterson, U.S.A., since 1912, but believes that he will further increase his own world's record to something over 26½ft.

The British Isles can produce no long jumper of the calibre of De Hart Hubbard, but S. J. M. Atkinson, South Africa, is reported to have achieved 26ft. 0¾in. at the Natal Championships, 1927.

SABIN W. CARR
(Pole Vaulter).

CARR is one of the world's athletic marvels. At Hill's School, in 1924, he set up a new schoolboy record of 12ft. 7½in. Charles Hoff, Norwegian and world's record holder, 13ft. 11⅜in., predicted that Carr would one day beat all existing world's records. Hoff's judgment was vindicated when in May, 1927, Carr smashed up Hoff's outdoor record

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by winning the American Intercollegiate Championship at 14ft. At the same meeting Lee Barnes, the Olympic Champion, also cleared the record height, but was unlucky enough to tip the bar off with his fingers as he was falling. In February of the present year Carr competed at one of the many American indoor meetings. He did not commence vaulting until the bar had been raised to 13ft. 10½in., and then asked for it to be put up to 14ft. 1in. That height he cleared with ease. Lee Barnes has since further improved the record by vaulting 14ft. 1¾in.

With the exception of Lee Barnes, I know of no other vaulter who is in Carr's class. We have no British athlete who can go within two feet of him. The Olympic record of 13ft. 5in. was accomplished by Frank Foss, U.S.A., at Antwerp, 1920.

GLEN HARTRANFT and CLARENCE HOUSER
(Discus Throw and Shot Put).

GLEN HARTRANFT holds the official world's discus-throwing record of 157ft. 1⅝in., made in 1925. His best effort with the 16lb. Shot has been 49ft. 5⅞in. At the last Olympiad he was second in the Shot Put at 49ft. 2in.

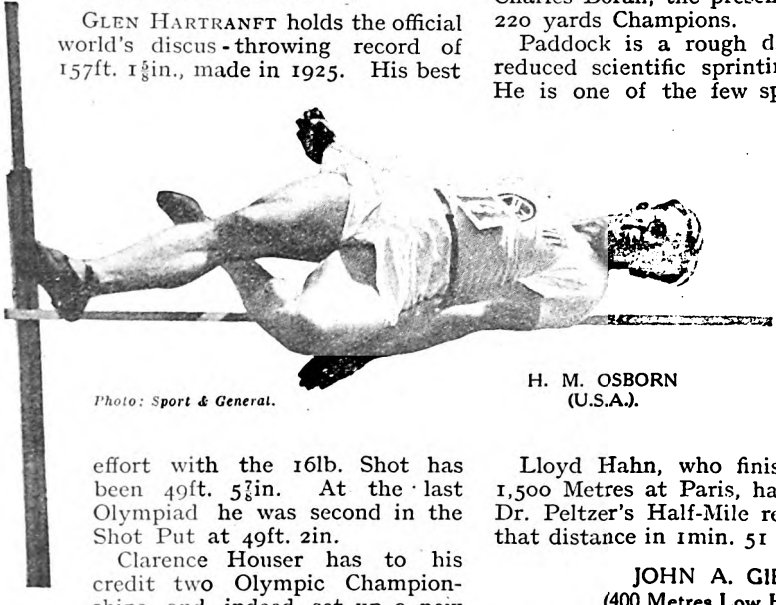

Photo: Sport & General.

H. M. OSBORN (U.S.A.).

Clarence Houser has to his credit two Olympic Championships, and, indeed, set up a new Olympic Discus-Throwing record of 151ft. 5 1-16in. at Paris. He is also credited with a new world's record of 158ft. 1¾in. His best with the Shot was 50ft. 11in., but recently John Kuck, U.S.A., has made a new world's record of 51ft. 0½in.

R. L. Howland, of Cambridge University, Great Britain, is developing into a real Olympic heavy-weight hope. He stands 6ft. 2in. in height and weighs 15 stone. He is a really good shot putter who has already upset all British university records by reaching 44ft. 10in.

ROLAND LOCKE
(Sprinter 100 and 200 Metres).

AMERICA's sequence of successes in the sprints has been broken but three times out of thirteen, and each time by a Briton. This year we have in H. H. Hodge and J. E. London, of the Polytechnic A.C., two men capable of beating even time for 100 yards, and in the C.U.A.C. President, J. W. J. Rinkel, a strong runner who already has proved his ability to beat some of the world's best men.

Roland Locke, a new-comer to International fame, has still to win either a national or intercollegiate American championship title, and yet is said to have run 100 yards in 9 2-5sec., while he claims a new world's record of 220 yards in 20 2-5sec., made on May 1st, 1926.

In summing up Locke's Olympic chances one must consider also the veteran Olympic Champions, Paddock and Jackson Scholz, and, in addition, Chester Bowman and Charles Borah, the present A.A.U. 100 and 220 yards Champions.

Paddock is a rough diamond, who has reduced scientific sprinting to a fine art. He is one of the few sprinters who have practised the jump finish successfully. He made his most sensational world's record, that of 175 yards in 19 2-5sec., last April. Scholz, in 1925, took the A.A.U. Furlong in 20 4-5sec.

The Olympic records are 10 3-5sec. for 100 Metres and 21 3-5sec. for 200 Metres.

Lloyd Hahn, who finished sixth in the 1,500 Metres at Paris, has recently broken Dr. Peltzer's Half-Mile record by covering that distance in 1min. 51 2-5sec.

JOHN A. GIBSON
(400 Metres Low Hurdles).

IN this event the United States has never yet suffered a defeat.

John Gibson, a short, dark, curly-haired fellow with an amazing turn of speed, won in 1924 the American Junior 440 Yards Low Hurdles Championship in 57 7-10sec. In 1927 he won the A.A.U. Senior title in the new world's record time of 52 3-5sec.

Meanwhile the official world's record of 54 1-5sec. is shared by J. K. Norton, U.S.A., and Lord Burghley, Great Britain.

In this event I think that both Lord Burghley, with his wonderfully strong finishing power, and his fellow Cantab,

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T. Livingstone-Learmonth, have a chance of beating Johnny Gibson and the rest of the world's best hurdlers. Livingstone-Learmonth, in fact, has the satisfaction of knowing that when he raced against Gibson in the States and led him over the last flight he would probably have beaten him but for a misunderstanding as to which of two sets were the proper finishing posts.

HAROLD M. OSBORN and W. C. HAGGARD
(High Jumpers).

THE High Jump is another event in which America has never yet suffered an Olympic defeat, and in which her athletes have held all world's records since M. F. Sweeney first cleared 6ft. 5⅛in. in New York in 1895.

Harold M. Osborn, who established the present world's record of 6ft. 8¼in. and the Olympic record of 6ft. 6in. in 1924, holds also the World's All-round Athletic, or Decathlon, record. There is nothing of the tall, slim lissomness one expects of a high jumper about his make-up. He is, indeed, a short, thick-set, and exceptionally powerful fellow. As a boy he became interested in athletics through the school successes of an elder brother.

At their home farm the three young Osborns regularly staged sports meetings of their own. Harold only took up high jumping in 1912 through the chance of reading an illustrated article concerning the high jumping of Alma Richards, who had recently won the Olympic event at Stockholm.

We have heard but little as yet of the new generation of American high jumpers. W. C. Haggard, University of Texas, who has cleared 6ft. 7¼in., appears to be the best.

In this event the European nations appear likely to be outclassed. England's coloured sprinter, J. E. London, has jumped 6ft. 2in., J. D. S. Pendlebury, C.U.A.C., and G. Turner, of the North, 6ft. In the 6ft. 3in. class are Kopke and Betz, Germany; Kesmarki, Hungary; Lewden, France; Helgesson, Norway; C. T. Van Geyzel, Ceylon; and the Irishmen, C. O'Connor, L. Stanley, and V. Shanahan.

GERMANY

GERMAN athletes signalized the readmission of their country to International competition in 1926 at the English A.A.A. Championships, where they placed four out of five men in the 100 Yards final; in the Half-Mile Dr. Peltzer put up a new world's record of 1min. 51 3-5sec., beating our best hope, D. G. A. Lowe, by three yards.

DR. OTTO PELTZER
(Middle Distance Runner).

DR. OTTO PELTZER is a tall, slim athlete of the fair, Saxon type. In 1926 he ran brilliantly, but was out of form last year on the flat. He has recently returned from America, where he suffered several defeats.

In the world's 800 Metres Championship he will meet not only Lloyd Hahn, U.S.A., but also the present Olympic Champion, D. G. A. Lowe, Great Britain, and the three Martins, who hail respectively from Switzerland, France, and America.

This undoubtedly will be *the* race of the Games, and I fancy that Lowe has more than a chance of retaining his Olympic laurels.

R. CORTS and H. KORNIG
(Sprinters—100 Metres).

IN these two athletes Germany has a pair of flyers who may well trouble the world's best. Both have won English and German Championships and have equalled the Olympic 100 Metres record. Our own best men have yet to beat them. Both Corts and J. E. London, however, were compelled last year to lower their colours to the Norwegian, Olav Anderssen, at Oslo.

S. SCHLOKAT and H. HOFFMEISTER
(Javelin and Discus Throwers).

S. SCHLOKAT, like our own champion, J. Dalrymple, is short in stature, as javelin throwers go, but he is thick-set and immensely powerful. At Oslo on September 18th, 1927, he set the hall-mark upon his career by beating the Norwegian record holder, Olav Sunde, with a throw of 211ft. 11 3-10in.

H. Hoffmeister is, in appearance, less like a discus thrower than any man I have ever seen. He is certainly tall enough, but so slimly built as to appear almost fragile. His personal record is 154ft. 4in.

Our best Briton in this event has yet to reach the 130ft. mark.

F. HIRSCHFELD
(Shot Putter).

F. HIRSCHFELD is another of Germany's best Olympic "bets." Last year he reached to 47ft. 5¾in., and this year has placed himself right in the first class by beating the Olympic record with a put of 50ft. 6in.

HUNGARY

THE development of Hungary has been in the field events, and at last year's A.A.A. Championships two new British records were established by Hungarians, Bela Szepes throwing the javelin 212ft. 7½in., while Koloman Marvalits reached 145ft. 8½in. with the discus. This is not his best performance, for he has thrown 153ft. 3½in.

There is a similarity about these two Hungarians. Both men are clerks in Budapest, both stand about 5ft. 9in. in height, and are of the same sturdy build with magnificently muscled bodies and limbs.

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Bela Szepes (javelin thrower), at the age of nineteen, was placed first in all the Polish ski-jumping contests and in the following year won the Hungarian Scholastic Javelin Throwing Championship with a throw of 163ft. To-day at twenty-five he is one of the five finest throwers in the world.

NORWAY

NORWAY, so far, has produced but one Olympic Champion, Captain Helge Lövland, now Director of National Athletics, who won the Decathlon at Antwerp in 1920. Norway with its widely scattered population, however, has built up a wonderfully high standard of general athletic efficiency.

Among the best Norwegian hopes are P. O. Andersen, the sprinter, and Ketil Askildt, a veritable discus-throwing giant.

P. O. Andersen is a magnificent specimen of Norse manhood, a fine, upstanding, handsome young Viking, with a raking great stride. Last year in Oslo he equalled Olympic record of 10 3-5sec. for 100 Metres, and it is at that distance that he will be most dangerous to the other competitors at Amsterdam.

Ketil Askildt of Hermod has never yet produced quite the best one is justified in expecting for a discus thrower of his sturdy build. At the last Olympiad he finished fifth with a throw of 142ft. 4 9-16in., but he was then obviously nervous. He was second in the 1926 A.A.A. Championship to P. J. Bermingham, Ireland, and fourth last year to Marvalits, Hungary, and on neither occasion did he reach 140ft. He has thrown over 146ft. at home in Norway. The Irishman, Bermingham, however, has beaten 153ft. within the last twelve months.

FINLAND

FINLAND'S initial development, like that of Hungary, was towards the field events, the reason being, one supposes, that ski-ing, snowballing, and other winter sports build up the throwing and jumping muscles and give to the athlete that sense of balance so essential to success in the field events.

The Finns, however, were out for something more than success in a few isolated events. They embraced the Olympic ideal as a part of their national development, and since, rightly or wrongly, more "kudos" attaches to flat racing than to field events with the general public, they determined to evolve a school of distance runners. How well they have succeeded is witnessed by the startling records of men like Hannes Kolehmainen, Paavo Nurmi, Willie Ritola, and Albin Stenroos.

D. G. A. LOWE
(Great Britain).
Photo: Sport & General.

PAAVO NURMI
(Middle Distance Runner).

PAAVO NURMI, the world's wonder athlete, now nearing the early thirties, has smashed up more middle distance running records than I have space to mention, but the greatest of all was the One Mile in 4min. 10 3-5sec. at Stockholm on September 24th, 1923. I shall never forget the way that amazing, tireless 9ft. stride of Nurmi's carried him over the ground and broke the heart of Edwin Wide, the Swedish Champion.

After his record-breaking run at Stockholm something sensational was expected of Nurmi at Paris in 1924. He was the outstanding figure of the Olympic track contests with four victories to his credit, in three of which he broke Olympic record. He won the 1,500 Metres in 3min. 53 3-5sec., the 5,000 Metres in 14min. 31 1-5 sec., and finished first in the 3,000 Metres team race in 8min. 32sec. His time for winning the 10,000 Metres Cross Country race was 32min. 54 4-5sec. That Cross Country race was run on one of the hottest days I ever remember, but Nurmi finished fresh and unfatigued, while others were left upon the point of death through heat prostration.

Nurmi has suffered defeats, since his Paris triumphs, at the hands of Edwin Wide, Sweden; Otto Peltzer, Germany; and Lloyd Hahn, U.S.A., and it is rumoured that he may turn his attention to the Marathon race at Amsterdam. Personally, I expect a revival of his old track form and look forward to seeing him once again consulting the stop-watch he carries as he reels off the laps to schedule time.

WILLIE RITOLA
(Distance Runner).

WILLIE RITOLA is the man who disappointed America in

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1924. Prior to the Paris Olympiad he resided in the United States. However, he refused to take out nationalization papers and returned to Finland to represent his native land.

At Paris his time of 30min. 23 1-5sec. for 10,000 Metres improved the world's record by approximately 12sec., and in the 3,000 Metres Steeplechase he set up a new Olympic record of 9min. 33 3-5sec. He finished second to Nurmi in the 5,000 Metres run, 3,000 Metres Team and 10,000 Metres Cross Country races.

He has every prospect of retaining his 10,000 Metres title at Amsterdam, but may have to acknowledge a better steeplechaser in J. E. Webster, the English National Cross-Country and Steeplechase Champion.

J. E. WEBSTER
(Great Britain).
Photo: Sport & General.

Finland's field events strength is even more impressive. At Paris E. V. Vilen finished a very good second to Morgan Taylor, U.S.A., in the 400 Metres Hurdles race, run in world's record time. V. Tuulos, although now in the veteran stage, must still be reckoned with. In 1920 he won the Olympic Hop-Step-and-Jump at 47ft. 7⅛in., and, although beaten into third place at Paris, produced his best effort of 50ft. 5in., only half a foot behind the winner.

There are yet two other athletes to be considered who, recently, have broken world's records, E. Penttilä having thrown the javelin the almost incredible distance of 229ft. 3 3-20in., while Paavo Yrjölä has proved himself the finest all-round athlete in the world with the following performances: 100 Metres 11 7-10sec., Long Jump 22ft. 11in., Shot Put 46ft. 10½in., High Jump 6ft. 11in., 400 Metres 52 4-5sec., 110 Metres Hurdles 16 4-5sec., Discus Throw 133ft. 8⅜in., Pole Vault 10ft. 6in., Javelin Throw 188ft. 4in., and 1,500 Metres 4min. 41 4-5sec.

Finland has four other javelin men capable of beating 200ft., and four shot putters who can beat 48ft. The best of the shot putters is Kalle Jarvinen, who last year recorded 49ft. 10in., and never once in competition failed to do better than 48ft.

A. Vahlstedt achieved a peculiar distinction last year by winning two Finnish Championships of a totally unallied athletic nature; these were the High Jump, 6ft. 11in., and the Shot Put, 47ft. 6in.

Finally there is Albin Stenroos, who won the last Olympic Marathon in 1924. Shortly after the Paris Games he migrated to the United States, where he has since won a number of important races. In one of these he was beaten by J. C. Miles of Canada, who put up a new record of 2hr. 25min. 40 2-5sec. for the 26m. 386yds. distance. The Finnish successors to Stenroos may be David Tagerlund and Carl Koski, but they will find it hard to overcome such men as Whitey Michaelson, U.S.A.; the American veteran, Clarence de Mar, who is a painter; Cliff Bricker, Canada, a motor mechanic, who runs solely against the watch; and S. Ferris, Great Britain, who finished fourth at Paris and has won the *Sporting Life* Marathon three times, returning 2hr. 35min. 58 1-5sec. as his fastest time in 1925, which compares favourably with the Olympic record, 2hr. 32min. 35 4-5sec., by Hannes Kolehmainen (Finland).

Then there is Percy Wyer, a forty-two-year-old Canadian, who is just 5ft. in height and weighs only 100lb., but is well proportioned. He has had much success and counts as his greatest triumph the Detroit Marathon of 1926, run in a blizzard over icy highways, which he won in 2hr. 51min. 30sec. He was born at Stourbridge, and emigrated to Canada in 1906.

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ITALY

ITALY has achieved some success in the Marathon race. R. Bertini finished second to A. Stenroos at Paris, and last year S. Natale was second to S. Ferris, beaten by less than 6sec. in the English Championship, in which the winner returned 2hr. 40min. 32 1-5sec. And there is a new discovery, Luigi Rossini, of Mantua; for the Italian Marathon race of 26m. 1,000yds. he recorded 2hr. 43min. 42sec. and beat G. Ferrani, another great runner. S. Ferris, of the Air Force, is however a likely winner for Great Britain.

Last year Italy sent over to the English Championships two really fine athletes of a new order. These were A. Garguillo, who extended D. G. A. Lowe and beat R. Leigh-Wood in the final of the Quarter-Mile, run in 48 4-5sec., and L. Facelli, of Milan, who made Lord Burghley equal world's record of 54 1-5sec. and C. Livingstone-Learmonth travel as he had never travelled before to beat him in the 440 Yards Hurdles event.

HOLLAND

THE Dutch people as the promoters of the Ninth Olympiad at Amsterdam are leaving nothing to chance in the preparation of their representative athletes.

To-day Holland has in W. Peters a Hop-Step-and-Jump expert who is very likely to win his event at Amsterdam; in M. Van den Berg a sprinter who already has equalled the Olympic record of 10 3-5sec.; and in A. Paulen, who holds Dutch records for 400 Metres in 49sec. and 800 Metres in 1min. 58 3-5sec., a runner who on his own soil may well challenge the best.

M. C. NOKES
(Great Britain).
Photo: Sport & General.

W. PETERS
(Hop-Step-and-Jump and Long Jump).

W. PETERS is a tall, finely built athlete who is just reaching his best. Last year at the English Championships he not only won the Hop-Step-and-Jump Championship, but also set up a new British record of 50ft. 9in., only just under 2in. short of the world's record. In the A.A.A. Long Jump he was placed third (23ft. 10½in.).

Photo: Sport & General.

W. PETERS
(Holland).

Our best English Hop-Step-and-Jumper is J. Higginson, the Northern Counties Champion, who can clear about 46ft. I understand, however, that there will be competing at the Games this year A. W. Winter, Australia, who won at Paris (50ft. 11 3-16in.); and L. Bruneto, Argentine, who was second (50ft. 7¼in.). None the less I feel fairly confident that the Dutch Champion will win.

A. PAULEN
(400 and 800 Metres Runner).

A. PAULEN has been a popular figure at the English Championships for the last two years. He was the victim of an amusing incident in 1926, the Hon. Secretary of the A.A.A. sending him off the ground to change his orange silk "shorts," the official having carefully measured the offending garments with a tape measure, to the huge amusement of the crowd, and found that the legs were perhaps an inch short of the regulation length.

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At Paris, 1924, as a young and inexperienced novice he ran very well, to finish fifth in a semi-final of the 400 Metres and fourth in a heat of the 800 Metres.

In 1926 Paulen put up a magnificent race in the 440 Yards English Championship, in which he was beaten by D. G. A. Lowe and Dr. Peltzer.

SWEDEN

SWEDISH athletes first came into International prominence at the London Olympiad, 1908, when Eric Lemming, a Stockholm policeman, won both styles of Javelin Throwing. At Antwerp, Wm. Björneman alone secured a win by taking the Long Jump, but to Paris Sweden sent a runner who must be regarded as unlucky, in that he was born in the same generation with Paavo Nurmi, for after Nurmi, Edwin Wide is certainly one of the world's greatest middle-distance runners. He holds the world's 2,000 Metres record of 5min. 26sec.

STENN PETTERSSEN
(Hurdles).

STENN PETTERSSEN is a tall, slim youth who has won fame since the last Olympiad. His legs are so long that he sometimes finds it difficult in the high hurdles event to fit in the regulation three strides between fences. He has been credited with 14 3-5sec. for 110 Metres over the high fences, which is a fifth of a second better than the world's and Olympic record, and holds the official world's record of 53 4-5sec. for the 400 Metres Low Hurdles. He has won the Swedish Low Hurdles Championship for the last two years.

GUNNAR LINDSTROM
(Javelin Throw).

GUNNAR LINDSTROM, like his countryman Edwin Wide, has been unlucky. In 1920 at Antwerp he was placed sixth with a throw of 198ft. 6⅝in. to five other Scandinavians. In the following year he won the A.A.A. Championship and set up a British record of 205ft. Three months after the Paris Olympiad he achieved the official world's record of 218ft. 6⅝in. At Amsterdam he may be beaten by Penttilä, Finland, while Lay, New Zealand, will be well in the running.

Our best English throwers are not good enough to reach 190ft.

Sweden has a host of new young talent in Bror Ohrn, who beat many of the world's best men in the A.A.A. 4 Miles Championship, and O. Sköld, a tremendous hammer thrower. Sköld is good for just about 170ft. But M. C. Nokes, I fancy, will beat all the foreign hammer-throwers if he can but stay in the 7ft. circle.

MLLE. KONOPACKA
(Poland).
Photo: Leon Jarzhnski.

SWITZERLAND

THIS small, mountainous country has produced some amazing runners. J. Imbach, who may not be seen at Amsterdam, for a brief hour held world's 400 Metres record, while P. Martin, with a previous record of 1min. 52 3-5sec., finished second to D. G. A. Lowe in the 800 Metres at Paris, and W. Scharer, with a previous record of 3min. 55sec., finished second to Paavo Nurmi in the 1,500 Metres, beating both H. B. Stallard and D. G. A. Lowe.

SOUTH AMERICA

ATHLETES from this part of the world are but little heard of in International competition, and yet Nuñez, Uruguay, has equalled the Olympic 100 Metres record of 10 3-5sec., while the Argentinian, V. Pina, 200 Metres, 21 4-5sec., and F. Brewster, 400 Metres, 49 2-5sec., and F. Kleger, who has thrown the 16lb. Hammer 164ft. 5in., are all men to be reckoned with. Nor must one forget Luis Brunetto, who is said to have made a Hop-Step-and-Jump of 51ft. 3 1-16in., which, of course, is better than the accepted world's record.

POLAND

FOR some few years past we have welcomed at our English Championships some fine athletes from Poland. I fancy the best of

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their men is S. Kostrzewski, who holds national records of 2,000 Metres, 5min. 48 7-10sec., 200 Metres Hurdles, 27 1-5sec., and 400 Metres Hurdles, 56 4-5sec. In the A.A.A. 440 Yards Hurdles Championship of 1926 he ran a good race, to finish third to Lord Burghley and T. C. Livingstone-Learmonth. Perhaps, however, Poland's best hope lies in the prowess of Mlle. Konopacka. She will be competing in the Women's Events at Amsterdam, and holds the following Polish records: Long Jump, 16ft. 1-10in.; Shot Put, 33ft. 1 3-5in.; and Discus, 128ft. 6½in.

FRANCE

FRANCE is a coming country in the world of sport, and has produced world's record holders and Olympic Champions in the late Jean Bouin and J. Guillemot.

SERAPHIN MARTIN
(Middle Distance Runner).

SERAPHIN MARTIN is undoubtedly the most likely candidate for an Olympic title that France will place in the field. Last summer he gave English spectators a terrible fright when he led D. G. A. Lowe for four-fifths of an 800 Metres race, which the English and Olympic Champion only won by inches in the last few strides in 1min. 54 1-5sec. In the same season Martin beat Dr. Otto Peltzer, Germany, the world's record holder, in 1 min. 53 1-5sec., and in the National Championships established a new French record of 1min. 52 4-5sec., which equals Lowe's winning time in the Olympic 800 Metres at Paris in 1924.

E. DEGLAND
(Javelin Throw).

E. DEGLAND is a magnificent figure of an athlete. In his second competition he beat the French record of 178ft. 1 1-32in. Various accidents and illnesses have kept him out of competition from time to time, but still in 1927 he achieved the magnificent performance of 214ft. 7⅝in., which makes him the fourth best javelin thrower in the world.

PIERRE LEWDEN
(High Jump).

PIERRE LEWDEN is his nation's veteran high jumper. He holds the English Championship record of 6ft. 4in. jointly with H. M. Osborn, U.S.A., and at Stockholm in 1925 achieved his best performance of 6ft. 4¾in. The marvel of his jumping lies in the fact that he himself stands no more than 5ft. 8in. in height.

EDOUARD DUHOUR (Shot Put) came suddenly into prominence last year. In the early part of the season he was in the 44ft. class, but in October set up a new French record of 48ft. 9 4-5in.

SEGHIR BEDDARI (Long Distance Runner) is a diminutive Algerian native. He last year beat England's best at Four Miles. His running may make all the difference to the results in the 5,000 and 10,000 Metres races at Amsterdam.

THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

REFERENCE has already been made to the chances of some of our British athletes from Overseas, and although the representation of the Dominions will be comparatively small, it will comprise men who have a real hope of achieving success.

SOUTH AFRICA

G. C. WEIGHTMAN-SMITH
(High Hurdles and Javelin).

G. C. WEIGHTMAN-SMITH, now twenty-two years of age, is a tall, well-built hurdler of the 6ft.–12 stone class. Over the high hurdles he has already broken many records, and is considered the most likely man to win at Amsterdam, and may well beat even Earl Thomson's world's records of 14 2-5sec. for 120 Yards Hurdles and 14 4-5sec. for 110 Metres Hurdles. Without any great technical skill he has already beaten 190ft. in the Javelin Throwing event.

S. J. M. ATKINSON
(High Hurdler and Long Jump).

S. J. M. ATKINSON is as tall as Weightman-Smith, but more heavily built. He also is from Natal. At Paris in 1924 he was unlucky to hit the last hurdle, through which circumstance he lost the Olympic Championship by the barest inches to D. C. Kinsey, U.S.A., in 15sec. He has been hurdling better than ever this year, and in the long jump is reported to have made a new world's record mark of 26ft. 0¾in.

NEW ZEALAND

S. LAY (Javelin Thrower) is a new discovery. Last year he set up a new Australian javelin-throwing record of 206ft. This year he has passed the 218ft. mark. If he is consistent in his throwing, he has a good chance of winning this event at Amsterdam.

AUSTRALIA

THE Australian Olympic Committee has selected in J. Carlton (100 and 200 Metres) and C. S. Stuart (400 and 800 Metres) two youths, both still in the schoolboy stage, who have won national championships; and two national record holders in the Victorians, W. M. Whyte (Half-Mile, 1min. 56sec.) and G. R. Hyde (1 Mile, 4min. 25 4-5sec.).

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The Leak

By

Harold Steevens

Illustrated by
J. M. FAULKS

PATTER, patter, patter. September rain drummed everlastingly on the studio skylight panes. *Drip . . . drip . . .* through some crevice scorched in wood or putty by August sun. Between whiles came a flicker of lightning from somewhere in the wide heavens and the slow roll of gathering thunder.

But Jabez Strone worked on without complaint. The gloom of the autumn afternoon consorted with his mood and matched his picture, "The Night-Raider"—coming very well, promising to be quite a good thing as Strone's things went. And so it might be, because Strone had much knowledge of darkness and hugged the cover of night's mantle, though his raids were for softer plunder than his canvas marauder's and his weapons subtler; sparing life and goods he took, when he could, what was more precious than either. Thus there were greed and lawlessness and unscrupulous flame in the face of his "Night-Raider," the truest work that Strone had ever done, a reading of himself, in a way a sort of confession, impelled, to be sure, by the conscience of the artist rather than the man.

A spurt of fire in the darkening studio, a shattering detonation. The lifeless trunk of Jabez Strone reeled where it stood, pitched crumpling, and lay still.

Presently the thunder drew off, muttering, and the rain ceased its drumming. In the silence, with lengthening pauses, *drip . . . drip . . . drip. . . .* Mournful passing bell for Jabez Strone.

WHEN William Billings, janitor of the Marbletree Studios, brought in the tea, he found the corpse of Jabez Strone. Aghast, the janitor ran at once for a constable, who promptly called in the nearest medical man and sent off an urgent message to the police-station. The surgeon's work was done at a glance; a small discoloured circle on the left temple and a ghastly open wound behind the right ear told him all he needed. Then the police Inspector, Ingleby by name, who had arrived in haste with a young plain-clothes officer, set to work with methodical energy, searching the studio within and surveying it without for traces or clues which might throw light on the tragedy.

He took possession of the revolver which was lying on the damp floor, first chalking the outline on the boards, then lifting it carefully by means of a paint-brush handle hooked into the trigger-guard. From the smoky smell which still clung to the bore, he judged that the weapon had not long been fired, a conclusion which tallied with the surgeon's pronouncement on the body—"within the hour." There were scratches on the butt which he left for examination later on.

Seeking further, he came upon something still more definite. This was a letter to Strone intimating the writer's intention of calling upon him that same afternoon to demand an explanation of Strone's behaviour towards a lady unnamed. In tone and terms the letter was indubitably hostile;

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it was dated from a studio in the same courtyard as Strone's, and it was signed in a bold hand, "Adam Delabene." Apparently Strone had torn the letter across and tossed it into the fireplace, where the Inspector found it.

When he had read the letter through, Ingleby went back to the table where the revolver lay on a clean sheet of drawing-paper and, taking out his pocket lens, bent down for a closer look at those scratches on the butt. Under the magnifying glass the initials showed up plainly enough: "A. D."

The natural thing, for a working hypothesis, was to couple the pistol with the letter, and the presumption was strengthened by the janitor's reluctant admission that he had heard Strone and Delabene in violent altercation earlier in the afternoon. Accordingly the Inspector, having sent for a warrant and dismissed the plain-clothes man to make certain inquiries in the vicinity, lost no time in stepping across the courtyard to Adam Delabene's studio.

There was no light burning, but the door was wide open, and a drift of fresh tobacco smoke told him that somebody was within.

"Mr. Delabene?"

"Come in. Do you mind switching on the light? It's on the left there. Thanks."

As the light went up, Delabene, sunk in the springless depths of an aged arm-chair, with his feet propped up on the table among his paints and oils, cast a swift appraising glance at the wet canvas on his easel, then turned his face towards his visitor. At sight of the tall, uniformed figure he sat up sharply. The Inspector took note of a slim, well-built young man in brisk outdoor condition, judging by the tan on his face and the set of his limbs; brown hair crisped above a smooth, broad forehead and a forceful nose and mouth.

"Good heavens, what a shock you gave me! But please sit down. You'll find that wreck of a Chippendale fairly safe. Inspector, isn't it?"

"Inspector Ingleby."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Ingleby. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I don't know. I am making some inquiries that concern your neighbour, Mr. Jabez Strone."

"Not surprised!" rapped Delabene, then hastily corrected himself: "But I shouldn't have said that. Go on, Inspector."

"May I smoke?" Ingleby's eyes, discreetly roving round the room as he talked—the artist's nonchalance impressed him not at all—had come to rest on a fine silver cup standing on the mantelpiece. Now, under pretext of lighting his pipe at the stove, he was able to distinguish the words engraved upon it: "Revolver Championship." His eyes gleamed.

"By Jove, you have something to be proud of there, Mr. Delabene," he said genially, turning towards the artist and pointing to the cup with his pipe. "I've done a bit of it in my time. Wants a good man to bring that off, though—and a good weapon, too."

"Mine's a beauty—true to a hair. Would you like to see it?" Delabene warmed to a fellow-enthusiast.

"I should, very much."

Delabene put out his hand to the table drawer and gave it a tug; the drawer ran out so easily that he brought the other hand hastily to it to save it from slipping out altogether.

"Now, where the deuce——?"—leaning forward and peering into the empty space—"I'd have sworn——" He paused with his hands on the drawer. "Oh, I remember now. I lent it to Strone."

The Inspector meanwhile, instead of sitting down again, had wandered quietly behind the artist's chair. And now, leaning forward, with a swift smooth movement he thrust out his arms, one on either side of Delabene, and deftly snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, at the same time cautioning him and explaining the charge upon which he had been arrested.

When that astounded young man realized that protest could avail him absolutely nothing, he accepted his position philosophically, only asking permission to write a note before he went.

Moving his manacled hands with difficulty, he got hold of a piece of paper and scrawled:—

> "Dear Jill,
>
> "Weep not for me. I've been arrested for shooting Jabez Strone. But I *didn't*. "ADAM."

The name on the envelope was: "Miss Gillian Venables, Withwind Banks, Riverslade."

"You need not seal it," said the Inspector. "I shall have to read it, but I'll see that it's posted."

HEALTH of dawn in her cheeks and the dew on her feet, a sprig of spindleberries in her hand and a russet beech-leaf caught in the wind-blown tresses of her hair, Gillian Venables came in to breakfast singing and found Adam's note on her plate. First she thought it was a joke, but that would not do, because the writing, though queer, was certainly Adam's—she could never mistake it—and Adam would not joke like that. So it must be true. Confound that Strone, what a nuisance the man was! Now she was indignant,

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then scornful; but she was not alarmed, because she believed with the simple faith of youth that the blunder of his arrest must quickly be rectified. His message was a fiery cross, however, and so, changing hastily into town clothes, she made straight for the Marbletree Studios.

There that old soldier Billings, the janitor, plunged *con brio* into a hoarse and harrowing recital of the previous afternoon's events, so far as he knew them. In the midst of a vivid passage relating to the Inspector he broke off abruptly and, diving for the Nottingham lace curtain which graced his parlour window, peeped cautiously into the courtyard.

"Golly!" he whispered excitedly; "talk o' the devil—there 'e is—Ingleby—see 'im? 'E's going up to the studios. Wot's 'e after now?"

Gillian jumped up to look. "I'll go and speak to him."

"Better not, miss, much better not. Yer never know what a copper'll screw out of yer. I've 'ad pals in trouble afore."

"Nonsense, Billings; we have nothing to hide."

Before the janitor could intensify his protest, Gillian was out of the lodge and walking briskly in pursuit. Ingleby, in the act of unlocking Adam's door, showed no surprise when she announced herself; he had shrewdly foreseen this meeting.

"You got Mr. Delabene's note, then?"

"Why have you arrested him? He didn't shoot Mr. Strone, you must know that—or you are a very poor judge of character. If Mr. Delabene had committed a murder he would have said so."

"Stupid of me not to see it in that light!" the Inspector retorted ironically. "But you see, Miss Venables, I have not the privilege of knowing Mr. Delabene so well as you may do."

"Obviously. I have known him for nearly a year. In fact, I may as well tell you that we are engaged to be married. Is it likely that I should want to marry a liar—or a fool either?"

"Mr. Delabene's no fool, I'll agree with you there."

"No, but he would have been a fool to murder Mr. Strone when he could punish him quite enough without. Strone wouldn't have stood a chance with Adam."

"Punish him? Why should he want to do that?" the Inspector asked innocently.

"Didn't Mr. Delabene tell you? Then why didn't you ask him? Oh, I see; he wanted to keep me out of it, bless him. But you had better know." The man was civil enough, if dense, and Gillian had no fancy for hampering a fellow when he was trying to do his job.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Venables?" She took Adam's arm-chair.

"IT was the evening before yesterday, when I was waiting here for Mr. Delabene. Mr. Strone came over to borrow a tube of paint. After chatting a bit he asked me to go over and look at his picture. I had been to his studio before with Mr. Delabene and I didn't want to seem uncivil, so I went. Well, whether he had been drinking or whether he thought I was that sort of girl—though I'll say this in fairness, I don't think he knew we were engaged—but, anyhow, before I had even looked at the picture, he took hold of me and tried to—oh, to kiss me and—ugh!" Gillian paused for breath.

"Did he, now!"

"I fought like a vixen and soon threw him off—he was in rotten condition—then dived under his arms and sprinted for the door. He stood and laughed; he must have locked it when we came in and taken the key. I was really frightened then. I thought I was trapped, and of course I didn't want to scream if I could help it. Then I remembered the window on the other side of the studio; there was a curtain over it, but I saw it was open from the way the curtain bulged. I flew across. He ran to cut me off, but I grabbed the curtain and flung it over him. Before he could get clear, I had hopped through the window and dropped on to the pavement."

"And then?"

"Then I ran round to Mr. Delabene's studio; he was back by that time. I was in a pretty state, half torn to pieces, and when I told him what had happened—I had to, of course—he went mad. I tried to stop him, but he told me to stay where I was and rushed away to Strone's studio. Presently he came back; the place was empty and Strone nowhere to be found. I calmed him down as well as I could, and at last made him promise to do nothing at all that night but write a note saying he would call next day. After all," with a wave of her hand and a meagre smile, "there wasn't much harm done and I had given him a scratch or two myself."

"Yes, I see," said the Inspector, meditatively. "Thank you for telling me. Um—not exactly a speech for the defence, Miss Venables?"

"Defence? I am not defending him. Mr. Delabene needs no defence."

The Inspector raised his eyebrows, but did not press the point. Instead, he said casually:—

"I am just going over to the other studio. Would you care to come with me?"

Gillian shuddered as she looked into

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that desolate place of evil memory and swift-following tragedy, but mastered her repulsion and followed the Inspector inside.

"This chalk mark"—Ingleby was speaking in his matter-of-fact professional way—"shows the position of the revolver; I've taken charge of that. But everything else is just as we found it, except, of course——"

"Yes, yes," said Gillian, in an awed voice; "but haven't you thought whether he might have——"

"Suicide? Impossible. You see, the left hand was still holding the palette, and if he had fired with his right he could scarcely have put the muzzle to his *left* temple; the course of the bullet proves that. And there was no powder mark on the skin either."

Gillian nodded.

"But, apart from all that, we should still have to account for the position of the pistol on the floor. Now, the medical evidence is that death was instantaneous; he would drop where he stood, in front of the easel here. But the body, you see, heeled to the right, whereas the pistol was lying away on the left, nearly three yards from the easel. How did it get there? A dead man could not throw it."

"No," said Gillian, thoughtfully; she had forgotten her horror in the interest of his argument. "No—but a living man might. Tell me, was the window open? I mean, supposing somebody had come in that way." She was thinking of her own escape.

"Wide open, yes; but nobody came in or went out by it, and nobody was hiding behind the curtain either. I'll tell you why. You remember how the dust was blowing up before the storm broke? Well, there was a clear layer of it on the floor—the curtain swings free, you see—not the vestige of a footmark anywhere near the window."

"Wait a minute. Why come in at all, then? Why not stand outside? Nobody was about, I should think, in that deluge, and the window is not overlooked. All he had to do was to wait for the lightning, draw aside the curtain, and fire with the thunder from where he stood. Nobody would notice the shot. Then he pitches in the pistol, to make it look like suicide, and off he goes."

"Miss Venables, you ought to join the force! There's only one snag to that theory, and it is not insurmountable. This wooden fellow here—lay figure they call it, don't they?—stands right in the line of fire. I tested it yesterday. A bungler would have hit it for certain; a crack shot could have fired under the armpit—there's just room. *A crack shot and nobody else.*"

The import of his words burst upon her like a full-face blow, revealing to her in a flash of cruel enlightenment the whole trend of his reasoning. She turned deadly sick, swaying on her feet.

"Sit down for a moment, won't you?"

Gillian groped for the chair he pulled up for her and sank down, dread at her heart.

"What is it?" she gasped.

"The revolver was Mr. Delabene's."

As her eyes fluttered and her head began to droop, the watchful Inspector sprang for Strone's carafe, dashed water on his handkerchief, and put it to her forehead. In two or three minutes she recovered and presently murmured: "I'll go now."

Ingleby held out his hand, a touch of genuine solicitude, almost of remorse, in his voice.

"Forgive me, Miss Venables. You would have to know sooner or later. And don't imagine you have injured him by anything you have said. Just the contrary. You have convinced me there is no collusion between you—I had to make certain of that, you know. It is a point in his favour, I assure you."

Gillian was too stricken to answer. Before she went Ingleby scribbled his address on a scrap of paper, saying:—

"There's my number. Ring me up whenever you like. If I'm not there, my wife will tell you when I am likely to be in. I'll always help you if I possibly can; you may count on that—if anything crops up. Perhaps you may find me a better friend than you think."

LATER in the day Adam Delabene was brought before the magistrate and remanded in custody after formal evidence of arrest.

Gillian visited her sweetheart in prison as often as she was allowed, decked always in her gayest colours. Adam called her his day's ration of sunbeams, and from the idiotic banter which rattled up and down that gloomy little tunnel of stone and iron, harsh conduit of lovers' talk, nobody would have guessed the creeping fear that dogged her day and night.

How, indeed, could Adam prove that he had lent the revolver to Strone for an artist's "prop"? How could he ever prove that he had left Strone alive, gone straight back to his own studio, and never stirred out till Ingleby took him away? Nobody saw him; nobody could speak for him. Ingleby, piecing things together, had reached the conclusion that Adam, in a blind fury of vengeance for the vile assault upon his lady-love, had shot down the aggressor and hastily queered his tracks with a false trail of circumstance and invented story. Who

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would dispute so plausible a theory? Who would ever trouble to search for the leaks in it? Yet there must be many with bitter cause for vengeance upon Strone!

Then came the dreadful day when Adam was committed for trial. Monstrous, fantastic travesty! But Adam's lawyer could neither rebut the facts nor shatter the links of pure assumption which joined them into a damning chain.

When it was all over, Gillian hurried from the Court and rang up Ingleby's house. A few hours later, in the early evening, the same kind-spoken woman who had answered her call mothered her into a little back-parlour, christened "Father's den."

Ingleby was touched by the change in her looks, used though he was to such things. The roses had wilted in her cheeks, her face looked pinched, and the zestful manner was not the effortless thing of two weeks ago. His sympathy was increased by his respect for her uncalculating truthfulness and his recollection of the pleasure he had found in watching the detached and logical working of her mind, to say nothing of the help she had given him.

"Mr. Ingleby, you said I might come to you, didn't you? I want you to lend me Mr. Delabene's revolver."

The Inspector raised his eyebrows and smiled. "I'm afraid I can't do that, Miss Venables. May I ask what you want it for?"

"I want to reconstruct the crime," said Gillian, with the shadow of a smile on her drawn face.

Ingleby stared at her in amazement, then gave way to a long chuckle. "You do, do you?" he cried at last (he owed her something for that purgatory in the studio). "And so you shall, my dear young lady, if you want to—but not with that revolver."

"Oh, I forgot! The finger-prints—how silly of me!"

"No, no—wash out! But the pistol is an 'exhibit,' you see; I shall have to produce it, and I daren't let it out of my hands for a minute. But look, here's an old one of mine—same pattern or near enough. If I lend it to you, you must promise to be careful and not hurt yourself—or anybody else—and bring it back to me as soon as you have done with it."

"It isn't the first time I've handled these things."

"Whatever you say I believe, Miss Venables; you know that, don't you? Now you'll want the key of the studio. But listen; nobody else must have it and nobody must go inside but you. No reporters—not at any price; they've been hanging round there like bees about a honey-pot."

"I promise, and thank you very much."

"A bit of true blue, that girl!" mused the Inspector, when she had gone. "Oh, Lord, what a pity! But you never know; she might find something I've missed. Good luck to her, anyhow. 'Reconstruct the crime!' Oh, that's rich. I'll tell the Chief that!"

GILLIAN was desperate. Cold reason told her that her chance of tracing a criminal whose very existence the police refused to credit was small indeed. Yet she could not sit still while the waters of doom closed surely over Adam's head. The phrase which had amused Ingleby so much meant little more than words to her; nevertheless, the idea had come to her in the extremity of her distress and she dared not reject it.

Gillian unlocked Strone's studio, stepped in quickly and turned the key behind her, then leaned her back against the door while she recovered from the spasm of loathing and fear with which the place affected her. Presently her courage came sweeping back, and with it a surprising sense of power. Shut off alike from aid or interference, she was mistress here, for this one hour—she felt it, believed it—mistress of her destiny. Urging, supporting, infusing her like a refreshing essence, was her love for Adam—nay, was Adam's self so dear, in fancy drawn hither by the power of her love.

Without shirking her eyes travelled over the barnlike studio, searching first the dark corners and the eerie spaces of the roof, then coming to rest on the open area under the skylight, where the artist worked and where he died. There was his unfinished picture still on the easel; his table, littered with colours, brushes, knives—all the paraphernalia of the craft; his luxurious sofa. Grimmer than all, the lay figure, with its horrible suggestion of a naked corpse come back to life without a soul—a slave for good or evil. Vigorous in pose, lean of body and limb, the thing looked so ghastly human that she would gladly have turned and fled. The friendly sun seemed far away; rain spattered on the glass; the place was like a sepulchre.

"I'll have the jimjams in a minute!" she said aloud, and with firm lips and a toss of her hazel curls, as though to fling off her horrors, she marched up to the easel.

Although the picture was unfinished, the central figure was well painted in: a loose, unbridled face, aflame with greed and violence, the human beast incarnate. Gillian shuddered and turned away, but quickly looked back again; her eye had caught the outline of a tiny circle chalked in but not yet painted. Examining it more

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closely, she made out that the man was holding a pistol and aiming it so truly that the muzzle pointed straight to the observer's eye.

But it was not the craftsmanship that set her brain tingling—Gillian was no artist—it was *the pistol!* Exactly! Then this would be the very picture for which Strone had borrowed Adam's revolver! Fancy Ingleby missing that! So far good; a splendid beginning. Now, what followed next?

THINKING feverishly, intent to unmask the clue—if clue it was—before it slipped her, she stared out into the studio with unseeing eyes. But, think as she would, no light came, and presently the tension of her brain relaxed; her eyes awoke again. And then, what—what was that before her? Her body stiffened, her head craned forward, with parted lips and eyes vividly alert. She was staring at the lay figure—no thought of horror now—staring at the long, lean arm and hand stretched out and pointing straight at her. Below, on the floor near by, was marked in strong white outline the rough shape of a pistol.

"Oh, Jill, you fool!" she cried with a gleeful laugh. "You utter little fool!" and, pouncing on her hand-case, she pulled out the detective's revolver and skipped up to the lay figure.

"Take hold of this, old man"—nestling it in his palm—"I think we are going to be friends after all."

She threaded the jointed forefinger through the trigger-guard, bent three fingers round the butt, and the thumb over the top. It was an awkward handful, but she managed it.

"Feeling rather wooden to-day, aren't you? Now hold steady while I cock the trigger; that's how you had it—look at the picture, man!" As the hammer clicked back into position the trigger went forward and rested firmly against the forefinger.

"Oh!"—a drop of water from the leaky skylight plopped on her hand, for the rain had come on in good earnest and was pattering busily on the glass.

Shaking it off impatiently, she went back to the easel and, taking a brush from the table, stood up to the canvas as though she were painting. Then, glancing sideways at the figure, she saw that the revolver was in line with her head.

"There! What did I say?" Sense or nonsense, the sound of her own voice steadied her wonderfully. "Now, what's the next thing? Ingleby's an ass; Adam said so, so it must be true—quite a nice ass, though. Well, who fired the pistol, and how? That's the point. Why don't you answer, woodenhead?"

She knitted her brows, eyes fixed on the pistol. But now she was at a dead-end again—and time was slipping by.

"Brains, Jill, brains! Buck up, old fellow, and give me a lead. What about a string tied to the trigger and pulled by somebody at the window? Oh, confound you, rain! How can I think in such a row?"

Snap!

"Ah!" Gillian shrieked and sprang backwards. The metallic clash of the trigger in the lonely studio was as startling as a cannon-shot. Rooted and pale, she stared at the wooden hand, her eyes wide with alarm. That lifeless hand had fired at her—and the muzzle was sagging from the shock!

"Suffering snakes!" muttered Gillian, pulling fiercely at her nerve. Then, defiantly: "You're not going to frighten me, you wooden old devil! How did you do that?" She walked up to the figure. "No more tricks, corpse-face! Lucky for you it wasn't loaded; Adam would have torn you limb from limb. We'll get to the bottom of this."

First she inspected the wooden hand from every angle.

"That trigger wanted some pulling. Oh, blow!" Another raindrop plashed on the crown of her head as she bent over the pistol. "Somebody thinks your hands want washing, and I'm not surprised, you black-hearted old scoundrel!"

Observing nothing by which she could account for the mystery, she took away the revolver and wiped it on a paint-rag—Ingleby would never forgive her if she let his weapon rust. Then, taking thumb and fingers one by one, she examined each in turn. There was nothing extraordinary about them that she could see: just plain, straightforward cedar-wood, beautifully smoothed and jointed—not a hidden gadget anywhere.

Plop!—on the nape of her neck this time. She looked up wrathfully at the skylight. But the word that jumped to her lips as the chilly raindrop trickled down her spine was instantly forgotten.

That deluge streaming over the panes—why, yes, of course! It was on just such a pouring day as this that the murder—but *was* it a murder? Could the very same thing that happened just now have happened then—because of the rain dripping on pistol and hand? For some cause that she could not fathom? Was it possible? *Could* it be?

Then in a twinkling Gillian flung reason to the winds, surrendering herself consciously, joyously, to something within her which was more than reason, or less—she cared not which—an intuitive light which leapt over reason's paltry barriers and sped

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her to her goal in a bound. *She was right!* She did not know how or why—did not want to, so long as she *was*.

Her brain was racing now, free as the air. She was wasting her time there. She must have help, expert help. Nobody would believe her unsupported word, certainly not the police. But with the experts on her side—— She flew to gather up her things, murmuring, "Bless you, rain! bless you, bless you! Forget all the nasty things I said. Bless you for ever and ever!" Then she ran to the door, where the faithful janitor kept watch.

"Billings, I believe I'm on the track—I must be!"

"Who did it, miss?"

"Nobody! That is to say—walk with me while I tell you. I've got to hurry frightfully. Yes, please—taxi, as quick as ever you can."

Gillian had thought of her old physics Professor, not without a twinge of remorse for her shameful neglect of him and his science since her college days came to an end a year or so ago. But that was before she knew Adam, and "Ditty" would forgive her. He would help her, too, if anyone could, and that was the only thing that mattered just now.

She drove up to the gloomy old pile just as the students were scuttling off home and ran her man to earth in his private "lab." Professor Dittany welcomed her with open arms—she had been rather a favourite of his. When he found that she had come to him for help in serious need, the day's weariness slipped from his face, the glint of scientific battle shone in his eyes; he became once more the strong tower of brain and rigid truth that she remembered so well.

Settling her in his own comfortable chair, the Professor perched himself on a bench-stool and told her to fire away.

"Well done, Gillian," he said quietly when she had finished. "You were always a good observer."

Reaching out from where he sat, he turned on the tap of the sink, then pulled open a drawer and took out a small sliding gauge. From his pocket he produced the stump of a stout unpolished cedar-wood pencil, inserted it in the gauge, and pushed the slide up to it. When the gauge held the pencil exactly, without either play or pressure, he fixed the slide. Then, taking out the pencil, he tossed it into the sink—and began chatting about old times.

Gillian, in her fever of excitement, could

hardly bear to listen to him, but the Professor talked steadily on, and presently he hit upon a forgotten laboratory tale that made her laugh.

"That's better!" he said, demurely. "Now let us see what has happened."

Slipping off his stool, he rescued the pencil stump from the water, wiped off the surface

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moisture, and placed it on the gauge. It did not fit—would not go in at all, without forcing.

"It isn't much," said Professor Dittany, dropping naturally into his class-room manner, "the fraction of a millimetre, but that is enough for the purpose of our

He placed the pencil stump on the gauge. It did not fit—would not go in at all, without forcing.

experiment. We are illustrating a complicated and little understood phenomenon in which imbibition, induced by osmotic pressure, possibly plays an important part. Whatever the explanation, a certain quantity of water was, in fact, compelled to enter the minute interstices of the wood, and the force of its entry was such that the wood was obliged to make room for it."

"You mean—the pencil swelled?"

"'The same idea in vulgar phrase,'" quoted Dittany, with a smile. "You have heard of the old trick of splitting stone by driving a wooden wedge into a fissure and soaking it with water. Very well, then; that gives you an idea of the enormous force which swelling wood exerts. When the wood happens to be jammed in between an immovable trigger-guard and a lightly cocked trigger——"

Gillian jumped up from her chair and put her hands on his shoulders. There were tears in her eyes, though her lips were smiling and her face was flushed with delight.

"Will Ingleby believe it?"

"He's got to," declared Professor Dittany, with cheery confidence. "We'll make him. Get him along to the studio and tell him I'll be there too, if I may. They know me pretty well at Scotland Yard. We'll have a demonstration: Professor Gillian Venables, assisted by——"

"A perfect darling! I could hug you, Professor!"

"The frigid detachment of the professional scientist, Gillian——"

"Pouf!" she said, and, throwing her arms round his neck, she planted an uncompromising kiss on his ascetic cheek.

INSPECTOR INGLEBY raised his eyebrows higher than ever when Gillian burst into "Father's den" that night with the announcement that she had solved the mystery—which to him was no mystery. But Professor Dittany on the warpath was a man to take on one's side, as Ingleby well knew, and he readily promised to attend the demonstration.

Gillian left nothing to chance. By the Professor's shrewd advice she got the janitor to light the stove and thoroughly dry the wooden hand. She also brought her wicker-work dress-stand to the studio and fitted it up with an old jacket she found there—the "Night Raider's," as it happened—and a

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roughly painted head of rags. This she placed before the easel, as an artist might stand. Billings cleaned up Ingleby's revolver for her, and she fixed it in the hand with anxious care exactly as she had done before, or so she prayed. Then, as the day was fine, she sent Billings up to the roof with water buckets and a syringe, to represent the absent rain.

"Better all stand away by the door, miss," the old soldier impressed upon her as he went off cheerfully to his job. "Never get in front of the muzzle, as we say in the Army. Besides, 'e might think we're pullin' the strings—see, miss?" He lowered a shrewd eyelid.

"Good idea, Billings. Make it so, as we say in the Navy. I'll be careful."

Patter, patter came the drops on the leaky skylight panes. And presently, *drip . . . drip.* Gillian, in an agony of suspense, glued her eyes on the wooden hand, counting each tiny splash. The Professor watched too, tensely absorbed. Ingleby alone, knowing nothing of what was coming (if come it should), surveyed the little tableau with professional impassivity—the gaunt wooden man with menacing arm outstretched, the grotesque dummy planted in front of the easel, and behind it that terrible face of greed and flame staring out of the dead artist's canvas.

Patter, patter . . . drip . . . drip . . . drip.

Gillian could hardly contain herself. Would it never happen? And if not—" Adam! Oh, my Adam!" wailed her heart.

Crash!

Over went the wicker dummy, sprawling on the floor. Down dropped the revolver with a thump and a rattle on the boards.

The dumbfounded police Inspector started forward, a flush on his determined face, his grizzled head thrust out, one solid arm flung back instinctively to hold the other two from danger. Then, striding up to look, he found the muzzle of the pistol lying crosswise over the old chalk outline and a bullet-hole through the ridiculous rag doll's ear.

"You desperate young devil!" he cried, half-way between anger and admiration. "You've saved your man, by crimbo, but you might have sent us all to kingdom come! Why didn't you say it was loaded?"

"I never knew it was!" Gillian, startled as much as anybody, was trembling on the Professor's arm.

"That's right!" A husky voice from above their heads made them all jump again. Looking up, they saw the wet and grimy countenance of Billings peering through the trap of the skylight. "Quite right, guv'nor. I shoved in a round myself, just to make sure. You *'ad* to believe it—matter o' life and death, see? So we wasn't takin' no risks."

"No risks! Oh, Lord!" growled the Inspector. "Come down out of that before you tell any more lies! Now, Professor, perhaps you'll be good enough to unfold the mystery. And then I'll get away, before anything else goes off. Too many tricks and traps about this place for me."

"It's really quite simple," said the Professor.

"Glad to hear it! Simple or not, I'd never have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes—not in a thousand years. Nor will the Chief either, I can tell you that, unless you can explain it to him by the book."

"He shall have my report to-night," promised Professor Dittany.

"So much the better. We don't want to keep that young man longer than we can help—do we, Miss Venables?"

"You ought never to have kept him at all!" snapped Gillian. "I told you that weeks ago."

"The lady's right," grinned Ingleby. "She always is!"

"I'VE puzzled a lot over that," said Adam. His arms enveloped her and should never unfold! Her cheek was against his and should stay there for ever!

"Yes, how was it, I wonder?" Was ever such a paradise in the compass of a sagging old arm-chair?

"Do you remember that day when I was showing you how to load a round quickly? Then we started talking about something else—ourselves, was it?—something important, anyhow. I must have forgotten to eject—I can't remember doing it—and put the thing away with the cartridge still in it. Shocking thing to do! Then I let him take it just as it was. So I suppose I'm really a sort of murderer after all."

Gillian put her hand over his mouth.

"What's the child babbling? Ducky boy, you know you're not! There was no murder in your heart."

"There was, though, till you charmed it away, you adorable beguiler!"

Gillian's arm tightened round his neck.

"Mercy on his soul, old boy! Now let's forget about it."

"Amen to that, Jill."

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An Afternoon Ashore

By

W. TOWNEND

Illustrated by
W. R. S. STOTT

CLAD in a neat and serviceable suit of blue serge, with a black bowler hat and square-toed black shoes, Captain Crupper walked briskly along a country road in California between blue gum trees and orchards in blossom.

He had left the *Arpella* loading cargo at Oakland Mole and had escaped for one day, at least, from the petty annoyances and cares of a shipmaster in port. Happiness had come to him in the song of the meadow lark and the mocking bird, the fresh, clear breeze scented with sage brush and the perfume of flowers, the blue sky and the warmth of the sun.

California had been the first foreign land he had set foot in as a lad, ordinary seaman before the mast on board a square-rigged ship. Since then he had visited every country in the world possessing a seaboard, yet California still was first in his heart, in spite of the changes time had brought, the moving pictures, vanishing wheat and cattle. Where else but in California could one find such scenery, such lavish hospitality, such friendliness, such boundless prosperity?

At a place where the sandy road cut across another road, Captain Crupper hesitated. Someone shouted :—

"Hey, there!"

He looked to the left and saw a large young man pounding towards him.

"Hey, fella, I wanna talk to you!"

Captain Crupper was not impressed.. The large young man was red in the face. He breathed noisily and seemed flabby and out of training. He had dark, beady eyes.

"Well!" said Captain Crupper.

"Which way you goin', Shorty?"

Though lean and wiry and fit, Captain Crupper needed no reminding that he was less than the average height. He resented both the tone of the young man's voice and the name he called him. Nevertheless, he answered politely.

"I'm going to the railway station. But I'm not sure now which is the right road."

The large young man laughed heartily.

"Haw, haw! You're English, hey? Say, Shorty, you listen : this is business. Keep right on the way you're headed about a mile an' you'll reach the depot. Now you pay attention. I'm looking for a young lady, dark-haired, dressed all in white. See?" His red, fleshy face hardened, his dark, beady eyes were hostile. "Maybe she's with a fella. If you see her, don't be scairt though he's bigger'n you ; you just say if she don't go right home at once there's gonna be somepin' doin'. Say I'm lookin' for her. Claude's my name. Claude Simpson. An' tell that guy she's with, Spearman—you'll know him by the size of his hands an' feet an' the cut of his pants—tell him if I find him hangin' 'round my girl I'll knock his doggone block off."

"Suppose I don't?" said Captain Crupper.

The large young man looked puzzled.

"Say, Shorty, I guess even an Englishman would do a guy a favour if it didn't cost him nothin'. Don't you understand the girl I'm gonna marry is runnin' wild after a good-for-nothin' ranch-hand we had to get rid of, just because she got it into her fool head he ain't had a square deal? I don't like it. Well, you say what I told you. If you don't, maybe you wanna look out next time we meet!"

Captain Crupper nodded and walked on.

A GIRL in white wept in a young man's arms under a tall blue gum tree near which was an old Ford car in the last stages of decrepitude.

Captain Crupper halted almost without intention.

"David!" the girl sobbed. "Oh, David, whatever am I going to do without you?"

Captain Crupper was debating in his mind whether to warn them that Claude Simpson

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was on their track when the girl raised a delicate, tanned face stained with tears and gazed at him defiantly.

"I beg your pardon," said Captain Crupper, "but is anything wrong?"

"Everything's wrong," said the girl. "They're sending David away. Maybe I'll never see him again."

"You sure will," said the boy.

"Something may happen," said the girl.

"I take it," said Captain Crupper, after a short and painful pause; "I take it, not wishing to pry, that you're attached to each other?"

"Attached to each other!" said the boy. "I'll tell the world we are."

The girl disengaged herself from his arms and dried her eyes. She was a pretty girl, with black bobbed hair and a tanned face and thin features. Her lips were a geranium petal pink, their own natural colour, Captain Crupper was pleased to observe, and her eyes were a soft blue. She wore no hat. Her frock, a creamy white, a short-sleeved jumper that fitted her slender body closely, and a short, pleated skirt, her silk stockings and white pumps, were of a sufficiently good quality to be considered expensive, to have cost money. Therefore, Captain Crupper argued, she must be the daughter of well-to-do parents. The young man, on the other hand—and he also was brown and lean, and some four or five inches taller than the girl—was clad in a shabby old brown suit with a soft khaki shirt with the collar turned up about his neck and no tie.

Captain Crupper liked the pair of them.

"AND you want to get married?" he said. "Is there any just cause or impediment, as they say — any barrier?"

"None," said the young man. "Except money, I guess."

"He means," said the girl, "he couldn't give me the things he'd like to. As if that would make any difference!" She added, as though by way of explanation: "David's been working for Uncle George."

"Excuse me if I seem personal, but I take it your Uncle George objects to the marriage? Is that so? But what's it to do with him?"

"Uncle George is in charge of the ranch. But it was David did all the work."

Captain Crupper found it difficult to follow the girl's reasoning.

"And is Uncle George your guardian, then?"

"No, there's grandfather. He owns the ranch. But he's old and he's sick."

"I see. Does he know you and David are fond of each other?"

"No," said the girl.

"We dursen't tell him," said the boy.

"Well, now, you listen to me," said Captain Crupper. "Are you of age?"

"Yes," said the girl, "last year."

"I'm twenty-two," said the boy, "an' I never done a doggone thing yet but be a ranch-hand."

"I was a deck-hand myself when I married," said Captain Crupper, "on money that was starvation made visible and respectable. But I didn't regret it. If I'd had a thousand pounds a year I wouldn't have felt any different inside." He rubbed his chin. "Never had a day's real sorrow or sadness, either, not till my poor wife died." He thought of Claude Simpson, who had called him "Shorty" and laughed at him. "Marrying isn't just riding around in a big motor-car, wearing expensive clothes, eating expensive food, and seeing your names in the papers! It's a whole-time job, and it isn't an easy job either; but it's worth it. If you know what you've got to face and you love each other, you'll be happy. It's nothing to do with me, and I've no right to talk, not a speck, but if you take my advice you'll get married."

The girl gave a little gasp.

"I'm scared of grandfather. He's got an awful temper when he's crossed, and the doctor told Uncle George the least shock might be too much. It's his heart."

"Excuse me for breaking the thread of the discussion, but have you ever met anyone of the name of Claude Simpson?"

The girl flushed under the tan.

"I have. He's Uncle George's son by his first wife. I despise him."

"Does he live at the ranch?"

"When he's spent all his money or is out of a job he does. He says San Francisco is the only place in the world a man can be happy in. I wish he'd stay there!"

"Which would you rather have, your grandfather or David?" said Captain Crupper, changing the subject once more.

"David, of course."

"It doesn't pay to let your relations live your own life for you."

The girl and the boy gazed at each other in silence. The girl took one of his hands.

"I'm willing, if you are," she said, shyly.

"It's not me that'll make the sacrifice, Judith, but you," said the boy. "Of course I'm willing. Gee! how I'll work for you!"

The girl smiled at him.

"Is it easy to get married in California?" said Captain Crupper.

"We could get married right now, if we wanted," said the boy. "I made all arrangements weeks ago, in case——"

"In case Uncle George could be made to see reason," said Judith. "In case anything happened to grandfather." She

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now. I never thought, honest I didn't, anything could turn out so wonderful!"

"Who's Aunt Amy?" said Captain Crupper.

"She's grandfather's youngest daughter, the last of them. She married Uncle George, two, three years ago. What she saw in him I don't know," said the girl. "Oh! I was going to ask you. How did you hear of Claude?"

"I dunno," said Captain Crupper, vaguely. "A fellow does hear things, knocking around."

THE round-faced clergyman was worried.

"Judith," he said, "I'd be pleased to marry you. But——" He broke off and glanced at his little, round-faced wife, and she was worried also, Captain Crupper knew, and frightened.

"But what?" said Judith.

"Have you told your grandfather?"

"No, reverend, I've not. If I had, d'you imagine David and I would be here? Gee!"

The round-faced little man sighed and ran his stubby fingers through his hair.

"You're a terrible girl, Judith. I never could refuse you anything from the time you were knee-high to a grasshopper. But this, Judith dear, is serious. Your grandfather's a hard man."

"Listen here, reverend. Are you going to marry me, or have I to take David and go trailing around half over the State of California to find a preacher who will?"

"Judith, no one else's going to marry you but me, and I don't know that there's anyone I'd rather see you choose as a husband than David. All the same, Judith, I wish your grandfather knew."

And how scared they all were of the grandfather, thought Captain Crupper, and wondered why.

"He'll know soon enough," said David, rather sadly.

"He will," said Judith, and sighed.

And so David and the black-haired girl in white were married in the little book-lined study in the parsonage. And when the ceremony was over and they were man and wife, and the round-faced little clergyman and his round-faced little wife had wished the bride and bridegroom all the happiness imaginable, there was a strained silence.

Captain Crupper, standing by a round table covered with books, came to himself with a start.

The girl and the boy were watching him.

"Yes?" he said, briskly. "What now?"

"You promised you'd come with us, Captain Crupper."

"I did. Yes."

The clergyman and his wife glanced at each other.

"Not for the honeymoon," explained Captain Crupper. "I said I'd tell this young lady's Uncle George."

"He won't like it," said Judith. "Not one little bit!"

She seemed thrilled and excited and no longer afraid. Such, thought Captain Crupper, was the effect of marriage.

They waved good-bye to the little clergyman and his wife, standing side by side on the front porch, and drove off through the little town of neat white houses and green trees and gardens bright with flowers, towards the hills.

Captain Crupper, seated precariously on the back seat of David's old flivver, with David's gear packed around him, bouncing on worn-out springs over the uneven, sandy road, glancing from side to side at the ever-changing prospect of orchard and pasture and woodland, saw a large young man emerge from a side road. He glanced at him without curiosity and saw him stiffen into attention and heard him yell:—

"Oh, Judith!"

He recognized Claude Simpson and chuckled.

The car began to climb a steep grade.

Claude, far in the rear, ran clumsily. Captain Crupper twisted about in his seat, watching, heard faint shouts. Judith and David, intent on the road before them, took no notice. At the top of the hill the flivver shot forward once more. Claude Simpson halted and shook his fist.

Captain Crupper laughed. He'd call him "Shorty," would he? He'd see about it!

"Did anyone shout after us?" said Judith, turning.

THE house was larger than Captain Crupper had expected. A long, high-roofed frame building with many windows, green-shuttered and white-curtained, and masses of purple bougainvilleas growing over the porch with its tall round pillars. When new its cost must have been enormous. Only a millionaire could have built it. And yet, viewed now in the gathering darkness, one could not help seeing that the place was in poor repair structurally and in sore need of paint. Weeds grew on the gravel drive.

"I'll go in and just explain," said Captain Crupper. "You two wait here."

He pressed a bell knob twice, and then after waiting some minutes pushed open a screen door and walked into the house.

The large room in which he stood, staring uncertainly about him, was suddenly illumined. A large, bald man entered from a door opposite, carrying a lamp.

"No electric light?" said Captain Crupper, politely.

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"Not yet," said the man. "We're getting it fixed."

He was tall and broad, but running to fat about the middle. He wore a white shirt and loose trousers. The top of his head was pink. He had a grey moustache and a large nose. His eyes were small and dark and unfriendly.

A woman stood in the doorway through which he had entered the room. She, too, was large and running to fat. Her dark hair was drawn primly back from her forehead. Her face was large and long and pale. She had pale eyes and a double chin, and she was frightened. Over her print frock she wore a large pale blue overall. This, Captain Crupper knew, was Aunt Amy, the second wife, stepmother of Claude, sister of Judith's dead mother, youngest daughter of Judith's grandfather.

"WELL," said the man in a harsh tone, "what brings you here?"

"Matter of business," said Captain Crupper.

"You're English," said the man. "Well, say, I've no use for you people. You might as well know it now as later."

"Glad you told me."

"No, I've certainly no use for the English. No good, none of them!"

"I met one once who was kind to his mother."

"You said you was here on business," said the large man, frowning. "What kinda business?"

"It's a beautiful country you got here. This ranch now——"

"If you want to buy, I'm not selling."

"I was going to say, properly looked after it ought to be worth money!"

The large man grew red in the face.

"Did you come here to tell me that?"

"No," said Captain Crupper. "I came here to tell you your niece, Judith, has got herself married!"

Captain Crupper heard the woman with the pale eyes catch her breath. The large man advanced a step and halted, his fists clenched, his eyes bulging, yellow teeth showing under his grey moustache.

"Married!" he said.

"Who did she marry?" said the woman, coming forward.

"Fellow called David—David Spearman. I take it, from what Judith told me, you're her Uncle George, who married her mother's sister. And this lady, then, is your wife! How are you, ma'am?"

The large man lost his temper.

"What the devil are you talking about, you little sawed-off runt? Can't you hold your tongue?"

"It isn't true," said the woman. "It can't be."

"I told you she would," sneered the man. "You dam' fool! You wouldn't believe me, would you? No, you said there was nothin' to be afraid of! An' you kept on sayin' so. Where's Judith at? I'd like to take her by the neck and choke her: an' that doggone husband of hers, too!"

"Do you want me?" said the girl.

She came into the room, very slender and dark, Indian like, thought Captain Crupper, and handsome.

The young man in the shabby brown suit, his eyes alert and anxious, followed her.

The large man snapped his fingers at him.

"Outside, you, or I'll throw you out, you dam' thief!"

He turned and grabbed at a drawer.

"Uncle George," said the girl, "that bluff won't work!"

"Better lay off, friend," said Captain Crupper. "But if you're headed for trouble, count me in on it! I ain't much to look at, no doubt, and maybe I am a sawed-off little runt, but I've spent most of my life handling tough hard-case deck-hands, half-crazed with booze. You'd be easy. I'm a man who hates violence, but I've got a reputation. Gimme that gun, or I'll beat you over the head!"

"Judith," said the large woman, in a weak voice, "you know I asked you. I warned you——"

"Any man who'd steal away a young girl against her fam'ly's wishes oughta be strung up!" said Uncle George. "You'll pay for this, Spearman. I guess you married her for her money. Why, say, she ain't got no money! You'll go, both of you, out this house, an' you won't come back." In the lamplight sweat glistened on his domed forehead. "You won't come back, neither of you!"

"It'll kill your poor grandfather," said Aunt Amy.

"As if we hadn't enough to bear without this!" said the man.

A Chinese manservant opened the door, looked into the room, and vanished.

"Anyone would think, the way you were taking on, friend, that this marriage of Judith's was going to wreck your whole future," said Captain Crupper, dryly.

He saw the large man quiver. He read in his eyes fear of discovery.

"Now, you just listen to me," said Judith. "I'm through with you people. I've got my own life to live. I worked for you, Uncle George, and you, Aunt Amy, didn't I? I can work for David. You turned David away because he wanted to marry me. You thought that I'd stay. Well, you were wrong. Where David goes I go. I'd rather be David's wife, living on a ranch-hand's

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wages, than living here at the beck and call of you two, not able to call my soul my own. And I didn't see it that way till an hour ago. And now you know, what are you going to do? Nothing!" She laughed in triumph. "Uncle George, let's see how you run this place without David to do all the work! You won't be sitting around drinking from morning to night now, will you? You'll work and earn your keep for once in

"Uncle George," said the girl, "that bluff won't work!"

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glaring at her. The likeness between father and son was almost ludicrous.

"Oh!" said Claude. "Is that it, hey?" He spluttered. "An' what were you doin' ridin' 'round with that roughneck there, hey?"

Judith laughed proudly.

"For the land's sake! Can't I ride around with my own husband?"

In the ensuing silence Captain Crupper heard Claude choke. His lower jaw dropped. His little beady eyes goggled. And then he flung himself forward, raging, at David. His onslaught was so swift, so unexpected, that before the younger man could defend himself Claude's large hands had gripped him by the throat and he crashed backward against a sofa.

They wrestled furiously on the floor.

Captain Crupper caught hold of Claude by one arm and his collar and dragged him to his feet.

"That'll do!" he said. "Strangling isn't fighting, it's killing! Use your fists. David, get up!"

As Captain Crupper stepped back, there was a roar of wild anger. "You let my boy be!" He turned swiftly in time to see the large man with the grey moustache, his face crimson, swing at him. He hit the large man twice, once on the chin, once just under the arch of the ribs. The large man groaned and slipped on the smooth polished floor and sat backward against a glass-fronted cabinet, which collapsed in a devastation of splintering wood and glass.

"Well!" said Captain Crupper. "Well, now!"

And then he realized that Claude and David were fighting in furious silence in the centre of the large room, while the girl, her hands on her slender hips, her eyes twinkling, her lips set in a little tolerant smile, watched.

There could be but the one outcome of the fight, Captain Crupper was certain. David would win. He must. Claude was the heavier of the two, the more muscular, but David was the stronger, the more active and wiry. His blows, delivered with perfect timing and, so it seemed, the minimum of effort, drove the red-faced young man before him across the room.

He punched him in the body with left and right.

"Had enough?" he asked.

Claude swung at him wildly and missed by inches.

"You dirty thief!"

David hit him in the mouth.

"Say that again, once!" He hit him in the mouth again.

Claude sank to his knees and whimpered.

David laughed, his brown face very grim, his eyes fierce, and Judith flung her arms about him and kissed his lips.

"You darling!" she said. "I've waited for that ever since that beast came into the house three months ago!" She stood and stared at Claude without a trace of pity in her gaze. "He's hog-fat and muscle-bound, like his father!"

"It's a damned conspiracy!" said the man with the grey moustache. He rose to his feet, shaking. "You," he said to David, "you'll pay for this. Assaulting my son! I'll have you arrested!"

"You talk," said Captain Crupper, "like a parrot I had once on board the *Arpella*, only not so intelligent."

The girl chuckled.

"David, before we go, just look at them! Ain't they sweet?"

"If your grandfather has heard all this noise," said Aunt Amy, "it'll kill him. Judith, I wonder you're not ashamed!"

"Amy," said a harsh voice, "don't you be a bigger fool than the good Lord, for His own inscrutable purposes, made you!"

The woman screamed.

A VERY tall old man with fierce eyes peering from under white tufted eyebrows, and a hooked nose and long white moustache, stood in the doorway, resting on the arm of the Chinese manservant Captain Crupper had seen a few minutes earlier. The old man wore striped pyjamas and a heavy dark-blue dressing-gown, tied at the waist with a cord, and slippers. He frowned at Claude, still seated on the floor.

"Claude," he said, "you'd better get up! You're no beauty any time: settin' thar you're like a prize bullfrog in a puddle. You said you could lick David. Guess you found you was wrong."

He dropped wearily on to the sofa. The Chinese servant arranged a rug about his knees.

"All right, Chang, you needn't stay." The man withdrew softly. "Well, an' what's it all about, hey? Looks like a rough house. Still drinkin', George?"

"Father," said the woman in an awed tone, "something terrible's happened. Judith's married David Spearman!"

"An' is this here the earthquake?" said the old man.

"I've married David, yes."

Judith's face was suddenly pale. She thrust her hand into her husband's and gazed gravely at her grandfather.

"She slipped off, without a word," said Aunt Amy. "I thought she was jus' goin' to say good-bye to David!"

"Oh! an' whar was David goin', an' why?"

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"Uncle George gave him his time!"

"Oh! Claude, you gonna git up offen that floor, or not? George, Claude's got him a black eye, an' so've you! Say, did David hit you as well as Claude?"

"No," said Captain Crupper. "The honour's mine!"

"Ah! An' your name is——?"

"Crupper. Captain in the Merchant Service. My ship's loading at Oakland." He grinned amiably at George. "I was at the wedding."

"Approve of it?"

"Sure thing!" said Captain Crupper, speaking what he felt was the correct idiom. "That girl wouldn't have been happy without her man. Marriage is a lottery; so's being single. No sense in keeping 'em apart. They're poor. What odds? Money never made a marriage successful, unless there's a speck of love attached to it. Life isn't to be played about with. The boy's got the use of his limbs, hasn't he? He can work. Worse things than having to work. There's idleness to begin with."

"Are you insinuating I'm idle?" said George.

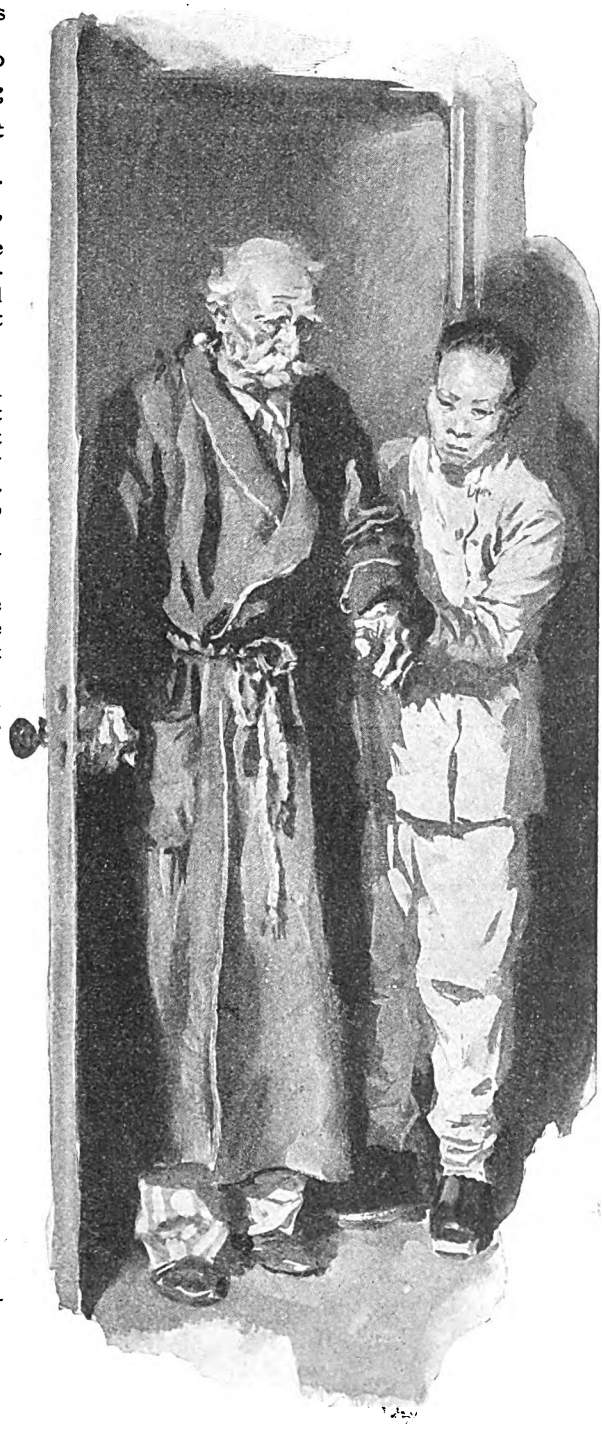
"It's more than probable."

"You're talking an awful lot this ev'nin', George."

"Well," said the girl, "it's late. I guess David and I'll be going." She spoke to Captain Crupper. "Would you like us to drive you to the station?"

Before Captain Crupper could reply the old man said:—

"Judith, stay whar you are. You too, David. An' you, Captain Crupper. We gotta git things settled right now." He laughed wheezily, bending forward and beating his hands on his skinny knees under the blanket. "Waal, waal; funniest thing I ever heard on since I punched cows back in New Mexico! I'm sick, am I? I'm old an' senile, hey? I can't stir from my bed! Can't I, by heck? I'm not blind, George. I know jus' what kind of man you are. Knew it three years ago when Amy married you. I warned her, but she wouldn't listen. I said nothin' more, not even when I found I was right. But now this lets me out! Judith, I was



A very tall old man with herce eyes stood in the doorway, resting on the arm of a Chinese manservant.

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afraid I'd be disapp'inted. I'm not. I thought you'd no will of your own. I was wrong. Your gittin' married like this to David has cheered me consid'rable!

"George didn't want you to marry. Said it would kill your poor old grandfather! Hey? Shucks! A lot he cared! D'you know what he was plannin'? He aimed to marry you off to Claude. You did, darn you! Think I don't know? You thought I was dyin', George, didn't you? If Judith married anyone else but Claude, the game was up! You'd lose out, wouldn't you? Got hold of my will an' read it, didn't you? Clever devil, George, ain't you? An' you fired David, hey? Kept him on as long as you dared, to do your work, till you felt it was too dangerous to let Judith an' him meet!"

George tried to say something, but the old man snapped at him.

"Hold your tongue! David, you take charge of the ranch from now on. Claude, if I ever see you round the place again I'll have you horse-whipped. Or put in prison. I know more than I want to know about you. George, I guess you'll go to work drivin' a team an' you'll cut out the hooch or you'll go to San Francisco with Claude. Amy, you're a poor weak crittur, even if you are my daughter. You'll stay on, or you'll go, jus' as you please. I'm old, am I? Senile, hey? Wait jus' wait a couple o' weeks more, an' see! Guess I know whar my money's gonna do most good. Judith's got more sense in her little finger than all the rest of the bunch put together. A girl who can sacrifice her whole future for the sake of the man she's in love with is worth while, believe me! Judith, I'm proud of you. Come an' gimme a kiss."

The girl did not move. She glanced at her husband, and then she said in a low voice, her eyes bright and her cheeks pink:—

"I didn't know I was sacrificing my future or anything. I didn't know anything about your having any money. And, another thing, I don't want you to make any mistake now. I'm glad to know you've got a good opinion of me, but I didn't do what you said!"

"I don't git you, child! You're married to David, ain't you?"

"Yes, grandfather. But I didn't intend to marry him; not for years, anyway. Aunt Amy was right. I was saying good-bye to him under a tree and was going to crawl back home and die, when Captain Crupper found us and asked what was wrong. We told him. He asked why didn't we get married! If it hadn't been for him, I guess David would have gone and I'd have been cooking supper for Uncle George and the rest of 'em, without hope or anything!"

THERE was a long silence. And then Claude spoke to Captain Crupper from the door that led to the porch.

"So it was you, was it, you little crook? After all I said, it was you persuaded 'em to get married!"

"Yes, my lad, it was! To tell you the truth, I didn't like the look of you!"

"An' so you wouldn't have married David but for Captain Crupper, hey, Judith?" said the old man.

"No, I wouldn't."

"Takes character to say that, anyways." The light of the lamp cast dark shadows across his hollow cheeks. His eyes were hidden. It was impossible to see his expression. "I'm glad you told me."

"I guess we'd better go now," said Judith. "There are one or two things I'd like to take with me, though. May I?"

"If you think, Judith," said the old man, "I'm lettin' the one member of the fam'ly I ever had any respect for go out of my life, at my age, you're mistaken. Guess, now you an' David are married, there's a chance of things bein' run economical. George, don't you scowl! Life ain't what it used to be out West, but you never know! It'd be a relief to a monotonous old age to have you creepin' in on me some night with a gun. Try it, an' see what I'd do to you! Senile decay! There ain't no sich animal, not in our fam'ly! Captain Crupper, I'm real pleased to meet you. You'll stick around for a month or two, I hope!"

"We're sailing South to-morrow," said Captain Crupper, "or else I'd be delighted." Claude still stood by the screen door, glaring at Judith. "Are you going to San Francisco, young man? If so, maybe we'll go together. You said things about me just now I'd like to go into."

The door slammed as Claude disappeared into the night.

Captain Crupper laughed. You couldn't beat California when it came to sight-seeing!

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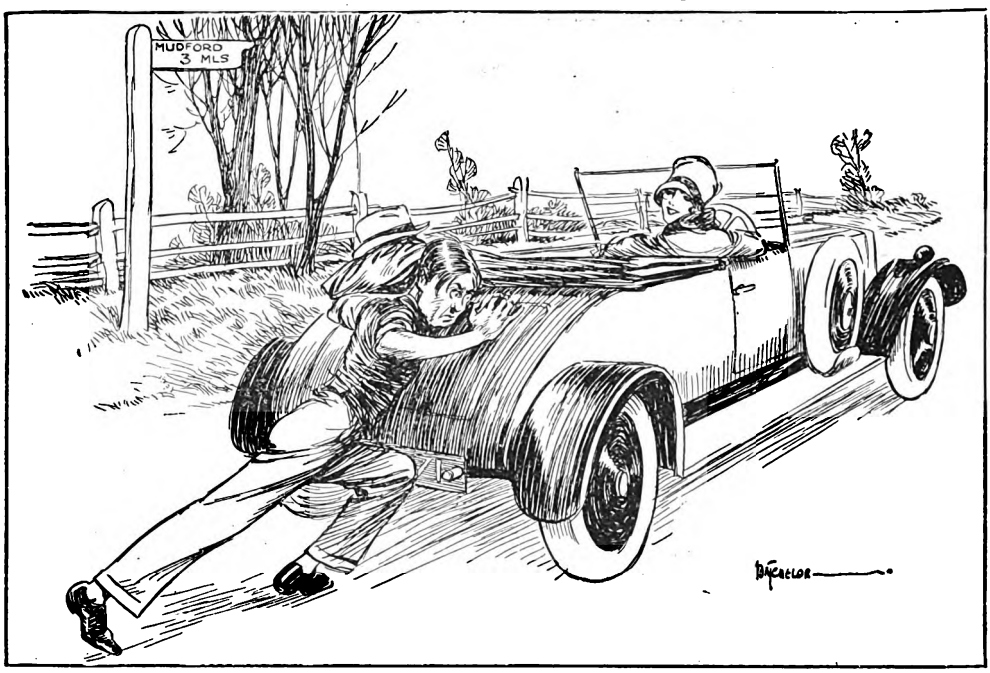

"I'm learning quite a lot about driving, sitting here, George. I've just found out how to put on the brakes."
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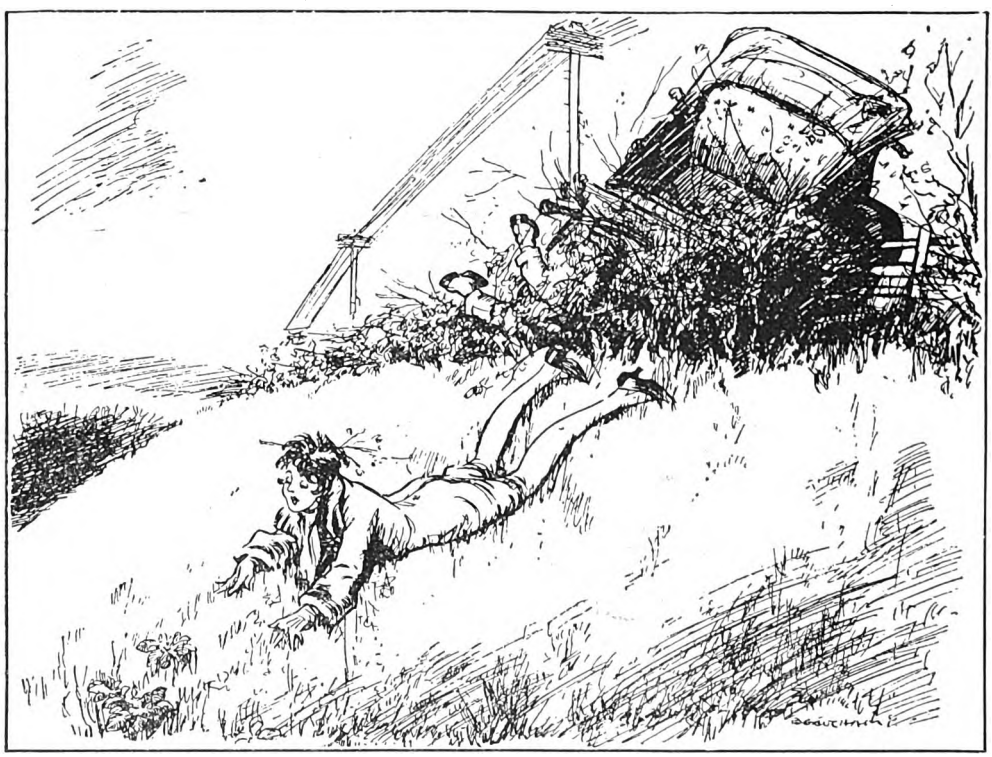

"Oh, Reggie, look! The first primrose!"
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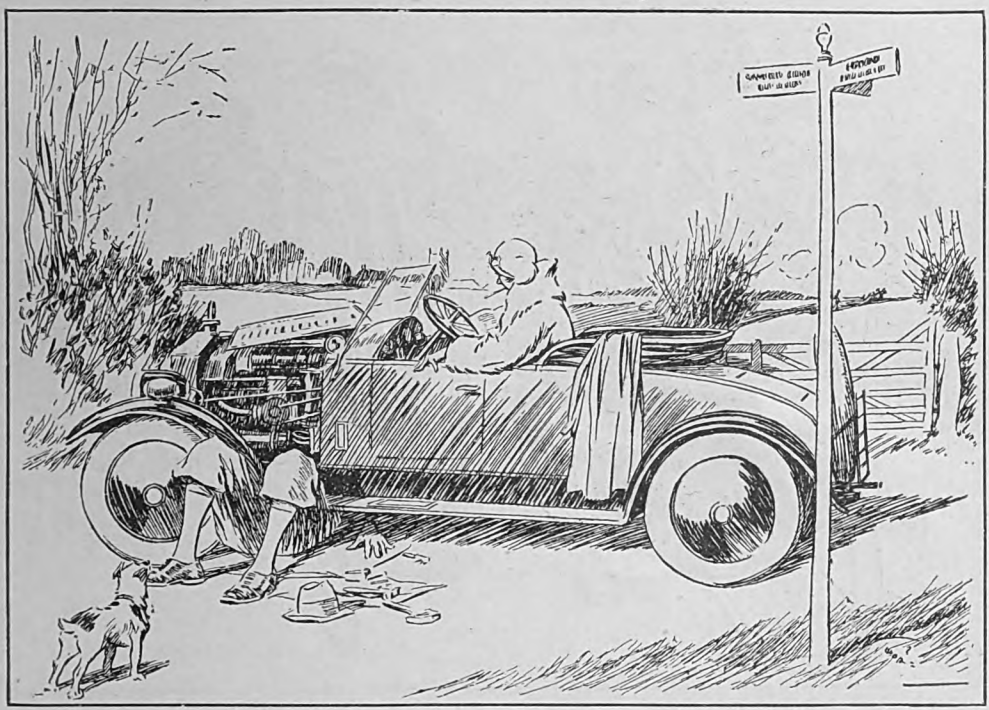

Enid (in her best furs): "Can I help you, dearest?"

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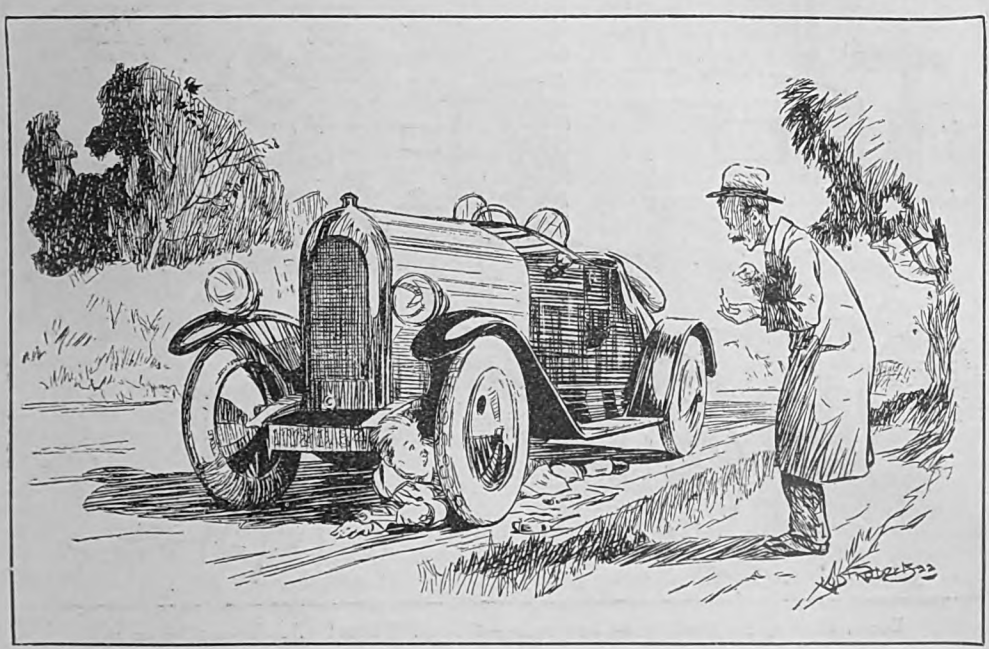

"Er! Excuse me, but could you let me have a tiny little drop of petrol for my lighter?"

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"THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES"

A Great "BULLDOG DRUMMOND" Serial

By

"SAPPER" (H. C. McNEILE)

Illustrated by
J. DEWAR MILLS

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH I GO TO THE FRIAR'S HEEL BY NIGHT.

I DON'T mind confessing that I very nearly chucked in my hand. The whole thing was too disheartening. It was worse than disheartening—it was suicidal.

Drummond had left the bar shortly after, and up till dinner-time I had no chance of a private word with Longworth. I made him one or two covert signs when the sailor was not looking, but he missed them all.

At dinner it was just the same. I came in to find him sitting at the long table between an elderly lady and a man who looked like a prosperous farmer. And not once did he even glance in my direction, though I tried to catch his eye on several occasions.

The sailor had beckoned to me as I came in to sit at his table, but I had pretended not to see. I wanted peace and quiet to think out this new development. If Algy went to the Friar's Heel that night he was for it. That much was obvious. Unless, of course, Drummond proposed to be there, too, and bring the matter down to brute force. But even if he did, surely he must realize that it was very unlikely it would help us to find his wife's hiding-place?

At length I finished my dinner and went into the lounge. I had seen Longworth go out previously, but there was no sign of him as I sat down. And as I tried to drink some of the concoction that passes in the average English hotel for coffee, the sailor went by towards the door,

"Good night, mate," he called out.

"Where are you off to?" I asked, carelessly.

"Going to see some friends out Netheravon way," he answered with a wink. "At least—a friend."

He went out under the pleasing delusion that he had deceived me, and I sat on. Where was Algy?

A quarter of an hour passed; a half, and at length I could stand it no longer. I would chance it and go to his room. I got up and strolled over casually to the office. There was the entry in the book right enough —"A. Longworth, Room 15." I went upstairs.

The room was empty, and I stood there wondering what to do next. It seemed obvious that he must have left the hotel, and, if so, he was probably on his way to Stonehenge by now. And the only thing to do, as far as I could see, was to follow him.

It was just about eleven that I reached the slight hill that passes the monument. I was walking on the grass beside the road to deaden the sound of my footsteps, and when I got level with the great stones I sat down for a while to reconnoitre. I could see them dimly outlined in the darkness some hundred yards away, and I craned my eyes to see if I could make out any sign of movement.

I recalled that vigil of the other night by the stranded motor-car, and realized that unless I did something soon my nerves would begin to go.

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I put a leg through the wire fence, and even as I did so I heard a sound that froze me into immobility and brought me out in a cold sweat. It was a shrill scream of fear, and the voice was the voice of a man.

It came from the direction of Stonehenge, and I crouched there listening with every sense alert. The scream was not repeated, though it seemed to me that I heard a hoarse worrying noise for a time. Then utter silence.

Suddenly I became aware of something else. I was still standing half straddled over the fence, when I felt by the faintest movement on my legs that someone else was touching the wires.

I peered into the darkness. Was that the dark outline of a man—or was it only a little mound? It was moving, I could swear it was moving. But it was moving away from the road and towards Stonehenge.

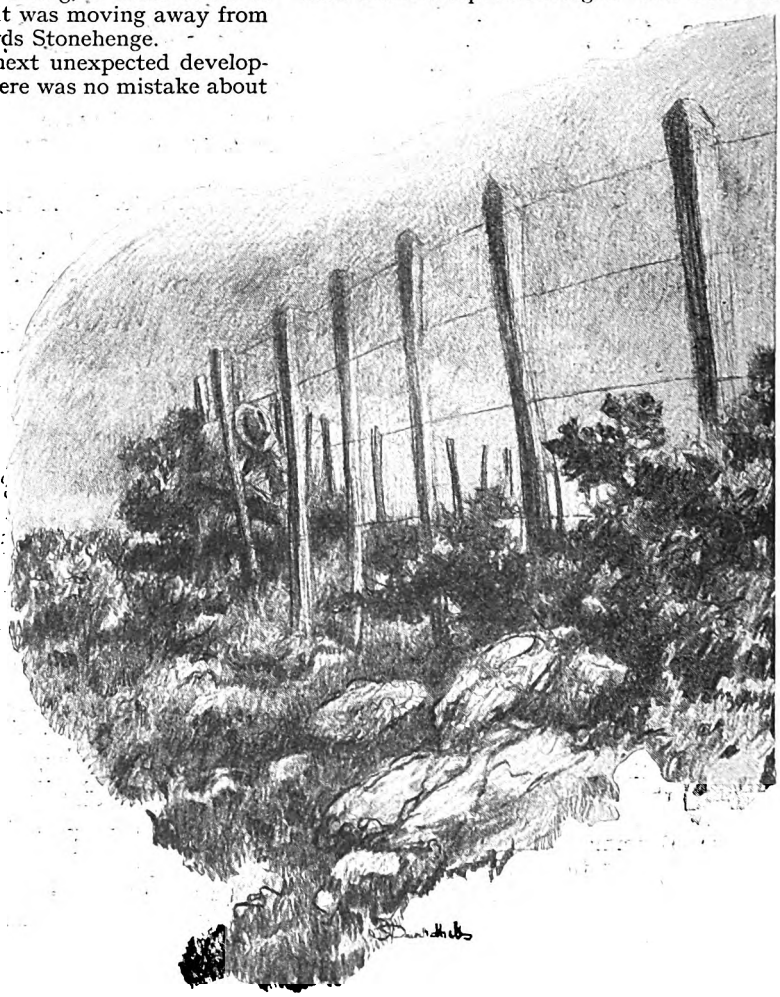
Then came the next unexpected development. This time there was no mistake about it; someone was scrambling through the fence without taking any precautions whatever. The wires literally twanged, and once again I crouched down waiting. Well for me that I did so; well for me that I was not still in the place where I had sat down first.

For a moment later a man, bent almost double, came swiftly past right over the spot from which I had only just moved. The fence was between us, but, even so, he was so close that I could have touched him, and how he missed seeing me I do not know. But I saw him, and long after he had vanished into the darkness I sat there motionless trying to puzzle out this new development. The man was a coal-black negro!

Then, foot by foot I wormed my way forward, peering ahead at every step to try to see the other man who I knew must be somewhere in front of me. Suddenly from about twenty yards away came the faint glow of a screened electric torch. I stopped instantly. Without realizing it I had almost reached one of the great stones. And for a space I stared at the terrible spectacle the light revealed.

Lying on his back, his legs sprawling drunkenly, was a man, and it only needed one glance to see that he was dead. There were ghastly marks round his throat, and his head lolled sideways. The poor brute had been throttled by a man of immense strength, and it looked to me as if his neck had been broken.

It was not Algy Longworth; the dead man was a complete stranger. But who was



the man who held the torch? His face was in shadow: I could not see the outline of his body. Was it the sailor? Or was it the

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This is all such a ghastly risk. Drummond is dead already: you've got his wife. Isn't that enough?"

"It is not," she said, coldly.

"Well, what are we going to do about this body?" he asked, wearily.

"Are those sheds over there empty?"

"But the risk, *chérie*. It is bound to be discovered."

"Not until we have finished," she said in a peculiar voice. "Send Pedro back from the car to carry it there."

They were moving away, back towards the road. And to my mind there returned those strange words of hers when I overheard her addressing the spirit of her dead lover, Carl Peterson, in the lonely house at Drayminster: "After, I will come to you." And her voice as she said the word "Finished" had been the same. What was in this strange woman's brain? What dark, hideous plan had she conceived? Because the conviction was growing on me that she was not only a woman obsessed with an idea—she was mad.

AND then the noise of the car starting recalled me to the present. Pedro must be the black man I had seen dodging past me down the road, and I had no wish to meet Pedro whatever. Crouching low, I reached the railings, and cautiously crawled through them. Then I started on my three-mile walk. From behind me came the harsh cry of a night bird, and once I paused and listened. It seemed to me that I heard a strange, worrying noise, followed by a sharp shout that was instantly suppressed. With an involuntary shudder I walked on, till the dim outlines of the giant stones were hidden by the hill. I couldn't help wondering what further horror had happened there. Had the negro suddenly encountered the other wanderer by night? And who was it who had shouted?

One ray of light, and one ray only, shone in the general fog. They had intended to kill Algy Longworth that night. They therefore intended to kill Darrell and Jerningham. The last lingering doubt that this woman intended to play the game had been dispelled. And it was therefore imperative that they should be warned. They must at all costs be kept away from the place. Once they were caught, the end would come at once: nothing could save Drummond's wife. This woman Irma would imagine that we were all accounted for, and no further reason would exist for delay. So Algy would have to be sent away as soon as possible.

It ought not to be difficult, I reflected. Surely someone in the neighbourhood must have seen the negro. He would be a conspicuous figure in a locality like this. And once he was identified, the house was identified. And once that was done, there was one thing on which I was absolutely determined. The police must be informed. If Drummond wouldn't do it, then I would.

Then another thought struck me. What if I informed the police at once, or first thing next morning, of what I had seen? Told them that in one of those old disused military sheds they would find the dead body of a man, and that the murderer was a negro. That would take them direct to the place and settle things.

I paused to light a cigarette, and as I did so I saw a red light on the road ahead of me. It was the tail-light of a car, and it was stationary. It seemed to be about a hundred yards away, and for a moment or two I stared at it thoughtfully.

I crept cautiously a little nearer. Something had evidently gone wrong. I could see the outline of the chauffeur as he peered into the bonnet. Another man was standing beside him holding an electric torch in his hands, and the chauffeur was tinkering with a spanner.

Suddenly the man holding the light turned it for a moment on to the chauffeur's face, and I stopped abruptly. For the chauffeur was the man who had sprung at me out of the ditch the day Phyllis had been kidnapped. No doubt about it now; the car in front of me belonged to the enemy.

I crept a little nearer, and suddenly an idea dawned on me. The luggage grid was down at the back. Suppose I managed to get on that! It would have to be done with the utmost care; the exact psychological moment would have to be seized. It was worth the risk: the information, if I could get it, would be so invaluable.

The chauffeur was closing the bonnet; the man who had been holding the light opened the door and got in. The moment had come. Stooping low, I ran the few yards to the back of the car, just as I heard the noise of the self-starter. I gripped the grid with both hands, and swung myself on to it. We were off.

A wild feeling of triumph swept over me. So far, I had not been spotted.

Presently I felt the brakes being applied, and then the car swung right-handed and turned through a gate. I could tell by the scrunch of gravel under the tyres that we were in a drive, and suddenly a light inside the car was switched on, and the car stopped at the front door.

Now I thought detection was certain, but still my luck held. The man and the woman passed into the house; the door closed

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behind them. And the next instant the car moved on. Once again did I get ready to jump off, when the noise of the gravel ceased, and I realized we were in the garage. Moreover, it was a big garage, and the chauffeur had driven the car in as far as it would go, so that I had at least ten yards to cover before reaching the door. I heard him get down and start fiddling with some tools on a bench. Should I make a dart for it now? Then the lights were switched off, and he yawned prodigiously. He had evidently finished for the night, and I only just had time to dodge to one side of the car as he came by on the other.

He heaved on the sliding doors, and they met with a clang. A key turned; his footsteps died away. And I couldn't help it—I laughed. The situation really had its humorous side. Without doubt I had successfully tracked the tiger to its lair—so successfully that I was inside while the tiger was out. And as my position came home to me I stopped laughing: the humour of the situation lay with the tiger.

I STARTED to make a tour of inspection. The main doors were locked; there was nothing to be hoped for in that quarter. And a brief survey of the windows showed that none of them were made to open. Cautiously I felt my way along to the farther end. A wooden bench littered with spanners and things filled three-quarters of it. In the other quarter, and my hopes rose as I saw it, was a second door. I tried the handle: it was locked. That finished it; I was caught like a rat in a trap.

What a drivelling idiot I had been! I had accomplished absolutely nothing. I didn't even know where I was, which would have been some recompense.

What about breaking one of the windows? It gave me a possibility of escape, whereas if I waited there was none. And even as I was turning the matter over in my mind I stiffened into sudden rigidity. A light was shining below the bottom of the second door, and I could hear footsteps approaching.

The key turned, and I dodged behind the car. A man came in, and I could hear him cursing under his breath. His back was towards me, and for a moment I had the wild idea of hurling myself on him and taking him unawares.

He found what he wanted, and left the garage. My opportunity, if it ever really had been an opportunity, had gone. But he had left the door wide open.

Light streamed in, and I crept a little nearer. He was walking along a short passage, and a further door at the other end was open. It led into a room, and it was from the room that the light came. The passage was evidently to enable one to reach the garage from the house under cover, but it was the brief glimpse I had obtained of the interior of the room that made me rub my eyes and wonder if I was dreaming.

The entire furniture appeared to consist of big stones. I had seen no chair—no table, only square and oblong stones. At least, I thought they were stones: they certainly looked like stones—stones about three or four feet long and a foot thick.

He had half-closed the second door behind him, so that I could no longer see anything from the garage. But I could still hear, and the noise was the noise a stonemason makes when chipping with a cold chisel.

I crept even nearer. Confound the risk, I thought; I was caught, anyway. And by this time my curiosity was so intense that it banished fear. At last I got near enough to see into the room, or, rather, into a part of it.

The room was a big one, and the first impression that it gave was that it had been specially prepared for some mystical religious ceremony. The walls were completely concealed with black curtains, and a thick black carpet covered the floor. On this carpet, in the portion of the room that I could see, big greyish-white stones were lying about apparently haphazard. Some were on their sides: others stood endways. Some lay isolated, others were arranged as a child might arrange bricks. One particular group that I could see consisted of four stones on end and spaced at intervals of about a foot, with a fifth laid flat across their tops.

Through the black curtains the lights stuck out—big, white, frosted lights that seemed to hang unsupported in the air. And after a while, as I looked at the one opposite me, it began to have the most extraordinary effect on my brain. I found myself swaying, and with a monstrous effort I looked away. Almost had I walked towards that light, self-hypnotized.

I forced myself to think of other things, and after a while the influence waned. I glanced up, only to shrink back against the wall of the passage. Where she had come from I did not know, but there, standing in the middle of the room, was the woman Irma. It was the first time I had seen her without a hat, and for a while I could only gaze at her speechlessly.

She was dressed in some sort of loose white robe, and as she stood there outlined against the black background, a hand resting lightly on one of the big stones, she seemed like the priestess of some ancient cult. Her beauty was almost unearthly, her whole appearance utterly virginal. In her eyes there glowed a strange light—a light such as might have shone in the eyes of a martyr.

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It was incredible to think ill of such a woman—to believe her capable of evil. Almost did I believe that she was someone else—someone I had not seen before. To think that it was she who had planned the death trap at the Mere; to think it was she I had heard talking coarsely and brutally at Stonehenge not two hours ago seemed unbelievable. And then it came once more, that faint scent like jasmine—and yet not quite jasmine.

"Have you finished?"

She spoke quietly, and now her voice was a delight to hear. And then she stiffened and drew herself up. Into her face there came a look of disgusted contempt. But the poor fool kneeling at her feet, with his arms round her knees, was oblivious of it. He was stammering wild words of love, was the man who looked like Lakington; and so engrossed was I in the scene that the fact of my unknown man being the man who looked like Lakington seemed almost trivial. What did it matter who he was, poor devil? He was just an actor in the game that is age-old.

"When, my beloved, are you coming to me?"

Again and again he said it, his voice shaking, his hands trembling. And she just stood there, utterly aloof. Her eyes were fixed in front of her, and once her lips moved as if she were speaking to someone no earthly vision could see.

"Have you finished?"

With a sigh of utter weariness the man rose to his feet.

"Yes," he said, "I have."

She smiled, and held out her hand.

"Good. For now there must be no delay, my friend. Pedro's mistake has forced our hand. By the way, is he back?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Probably, by this time."

"Anyway, I have written a letter which must be delivered to one of the three tomorrow morning. We know that Longworth is here, so he will therefore be the one. Listen, I will read it to you.

"'My friends, the game has begun to pall. My revenge is sufficient. If you will follow the bearer of this you will come to your destination. And the widow shall be handed over to you. If you don't, if you are afraid to come, you will still be quite safe. No further steps will be taken against you. You will not be worth it. But Phyllis Drummond will die. So take your choice. Her life lies in your hands.

"'But let me repeat the warning given to your late lamented leader. My information is good, so no police. Otherwise Phyllis Drummond will die before you get here.'"

"But, *carissima*," cried the man, "will they come on that? It seems such an obvious trap."

"Quite clearly, Paul," she said, "you have much to learn concerning the mentality of Englishmen of their type. They will come, even if a cordon of machine-gunners stood in their way. And we shall be ready for them."

"And then? After it is over?"

"After it is over," she repeated, coolly, "why, then, my dear Paul, we shall see."

"But you promised," he muttered. "You promised by all you held sacred. Beloved"—his voice grew urgent and pleading—"for nearly a year I have worked unceasingly to give you your revenge. Worked without reward, at times without thanks. Only hope has kept me going, *carissima*—the hope that when all was over you would come to me. And now you say, 'We shall see.' Never have I kissed your lips during all these long months. Irma—say to me, promise me again, that I have not worked in vain."

"No, *mon ami*," she said. "You have not worked in vain."

With a cry of joy he snatched one of her hands and smothered it with kisses. And over his bent head I saw her face. She was shaking with a hideous, silent laughter. I craned forward fascinated.

Suddenly the man straightened up, and instantly her face became a mask. Even did she go so far as to smile encouragingly at the poor fish.

"No, Paul," she repeated. "You have not worked in vain. To-morrow night . . ."

The sentence was never finished; too late I realized that in my absorption I had stepped into the light. For a moment or two she stared at me in silence. Then—"Who is that man?"

Like a flash her companion swung round.

"Why," he said, softly, "it's the bank clerk. Have you come to see my collection?"

He was moving towards me as he spoke, and in his right hand there gleamed a wicked-looking automatic.

"Come in, bank clerk," he said, still in the same deadly soft voice. "I am honoured indeed, even if the hour is a little unconventional."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH I MEET MRS. DRUMMOND.

THE situation was undeniably awkward. The fact that I had realized all along that detection was inevitable made it none the less unpleasant when it came. I stepped into the room.

"I fear it must seem a little strange," I began, making a valiant endeavour to keep my voice steady.

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" It does," he agreed, suavely. " May we be favoured with an explanation ? "

" To tell you the truth," I said, " I lost my way. I went out for a long walk to-night, and after taking one or two turnings I realized I hadn't the faintest idea where I was. Passing along the road, I saw this house, and I came up to see if someone could put me right. I couldn't get any answer, but I saw your garage door was open. So I went in, meaning to ask when the car returned. And I suppose I must have fallen asleep, for when I woke up the car was back and the door locked."

" I see," said the man. " It seems a pity that such a big discrepancy exists between the first few words of your explanation and the rest."

" I don't understand what you mean," I remarked, uncomfortably conscious that a pulse was hammering in my throat.

" You prefaced your interesting little story," he explained, " by the five words. ' To tell you the truth.' Why not do so ? "

With a faint feeling of relief, I saw that the automatic was no longer in his hand.

" I am not accustomed——" I began, haughtily.

" Be silent," said the woman, imperiously. " Do I understand you know this man, Paul ? "

" I met him at Stonehenge yesterday afternoon, my dear," he remarked. " A bank clerk with lengthy holidays. South Africa last year ; Australia next—I must apply for a position in that bank."

" Why wasn't I told about this man ? " asked the woman, harshly.

" My dear," he said, pleadingly, " what was the use ? "

" On your own showing," she snapped, " you suspected him. Why wasn't I told ? " Her voice was vibrating with anger. She swung round on me. " Who are you, you little rat ? "

" My name is Seymour," I stammered.

Suddenly her mood changed, and she lit a cigarette.

" Put him in one of the seats," she ordered, quietly.

" This way, Mr. Seymour," said the man.

" And what if I refuse ? " I blustered.

He whipped out his revolver and covered me.

" Move," he snarled. " And move damned quick. Come here."

He crossed to one of the stones, so did I.

I found that the stone at which he was pointing had been fashioned into a sort of rough seat.

" Sit down, and put your arms where I tell you. There—and there."

I obeyed ; there didn't seem anything else to do. And then there came a sudden click, and I felt two thin steel bars close over my wrists. I tugged and he laughed quietly.

" I wouldn't waste your time," he remarked. " You're as much a part of the furniture now as the stone you are sitting on."

Suddenly the woman came towards me. For a time she stood in front of me staring into my eyes, and then she spoke.

" Do you know Hugh Drummond ? "

" Hugh Drummond." I looked at her blankly. " I've never heard of the man in my life."

Still she stared at me, but my face gave nothing away. And at last she turned and spoke to the man.

" Well," I heard him say, " we might try."

SHE crossed to a door hidden in the curtains and disappeared, leaving me alone with the man.

" What has happened," he said, suddenly, " to that egregious fraud who was pretending to collect butterflies ? "

" I haven't an idea," I answered. " He left the hotel before dinner."

" Say nothing about him," he said, curtly. " It will pay you not to."

" I wasn't proposing to," I remarked. " I fail to see the slightest reason for discussing a casual hotel acquaintance, or what bearing he has on my present position."

" If you hadn't been a damned fool you wouldn't be in your present position. Now the truth, my friend. Who are you, and how did you come here ? "

" I have nothing to add to what I have already said," I answered.

" How the devil did you get here ? "

" I have nothing to add to what I have already said," I repeated with a smile.

" Damn you," he snarled. " You'll smile the other side of your face before long. It may amuse you to know that you'll never leave this room alive."

" That," I remarked, with a confidence I was very far from feeling, " remains to be seen."

He took out his cigarette-case savagely and started pacing up and down. And I, for the first time since I had come into the room, began to examine it more thoroughly. The whole of it was in keeping with the part I had seen from the passage. Stones—and yet more stones, placed apparently indiscriminately. And yet, were they ? Was there not some definite design ? And as I stared round trying to find the solution, I noticed a thing which gave me a queer little thrill. There were other roughly shaped seats beside the one I was sitting in—five others, making six in all. And each one

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was fitted with the same steel bars that encircled my own wrists. Six chairs, and six of us. What fantastic scheme had been evolved in that woman's deranged brain?

The sound of a door opening made me turn my head. Irma had returned. But now another woman was with her—a woman who was blindfolded. And with a sudden quickening of my pulse I realized that this must be Phyllis Drummond herself.

SHE had evidently been awakened from sleep. Her bare feet were thrust into slippers, and she had slipped a *peignoir* over her pyjamas. Her face under the handkerchief that covered her eyes was pale, but absolutely determined. Guided by her captor's hand on her arm, she walked firmly and without hesitation until she was halted in front of my chair.

"What new foolery is this?" she asked, scornfully, and I metaphorically took off my hat to her. Captivity had not broken her spirit.

"No foolery at all, my dear, but a very pleasant surprise for you."

Mrs. Drummond's hands clenched convulsively.

"You don't mean that Hugh has found me?"

A faint smile passed over Irma's face; the news of Drummond's supposed death had evidently been suppressed.

"Not quite that," answered the other, "but one of his friends has."

"Then," said Mrs. Drummond, breathlessly, "he has succeeded. And so I am free to go. Who is it? Is it you, Peter?"

With a quick movement Irma whipped off the handkerchief, and for a while Drummond's wife stared at me blankly. Then she turned wearily to her captor.

"Why torment me?" she said. "What's the good? You know Hugh's friends. I've never seen this man before in my life."

And Irma, who had been watching her intently, relaxed and turned to the man.

"That's genuine," she said, briefly.

"Is this by any chance," I remarked, ponderously, "a private lunatic asylum?"

"You may well ask, sir," said Mrs. Drummond. "I don't know who you are or how you came here, but there is at any rate one mad person present. And that is this woman."

"Dear little Phyllis," Irma laughed. "Always so direct and positive, aren't you? And now that you've been introduced to this room a little sooner than I had intended, tell me what you think of it?"

Mrs. Drummond looked about her, a look of complete bewilderment spreading gradually over her face.

"What on earth does it all mean?" she said at length. "What are all these stones for?"

"A model, my dear," answered the other gently, "that it has taken Paul much labour and trouble to construct. A model that is accurate in every detail."

"A model of what?"

"Of Stonehenge. One or two of the stones have been left out, but all the important ones are here. There, for instance, you see the Friar's Heel, and that one is the altar-stone. You know the legend, of course. Some authorities do not believe in it, but it's a very pretty fairy story, anyway. It runs that when the first rays of the rising sun on Midsummer Day, shining over the Friar's Heel, strike this third stone, the name of which I have not yet told you, the ceremony begins."

Her voice was soft and almost caressing, nevertheless my lips were dry. For I knew what the third stone was.

"It must have been an interesting ceremony, Phyllis. Can't you see those wild-eyed priests clad in fantastic garments? Can't you see that great rolling plain and the waiting multitude of savages—waiting in the hush that comes before the dawn for the first gleam of the sun above the horizon?"

I was staring at her fascinated: her eyes were glittering feverishly—her cigarette was forgotten.

"A minute more—and a sigh runs round the spectators. A few seconds, and the excitement grows. You can feel it—hear it like wind rustling in the trees.

"Inside the sacred circle stand the priests—some by the altar-stone, some by this third stone here. All eyes are turned towards the east to greet the arrival of their God. This is the day on which He vouchsafes them His visible presence longest: this is the day on which it is meet and proper that He should be propitiated and thanked. An offering must be made, a sacrifice given.

"And on this third stone, waiting, too, for that first ray to strike her, lies the sacrifice. For those around her, for the hushed multitude outside, the moment that is just coming means life—the continuation of the benefits their God has bestowed on them since last Midsummer Day. For her it means—death; the stone on which she lies is the Slaughter stone."

She fell silent, and I glanced at Mrs. Drummond. She was staring at the speaker with a dawning horror in her eyes, and suddenly she bit the back of her hand to keep back a cry. She knew—and I knew. But after a moment she pulled herself together with a great effort.

"Most interesting," she remarked, steadily. "And did you have all these stones put up so that you could play charades on them?"

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Slowly the madness faded from the other's face, and she flicked the ash from her cigarette on to the carpet.

"That's it," she smiled. "A little game of let's-pretend. We shall be playing it to-morrow, my dear—or rather to-night. What part would you like to take?"

The silence grew unbearable, and yet once again did I take off my hat to that poor girl. She was powerless, she was trapped—but she was white clean through.

"I am not very good at acting," she said, indifferently.

"Yours will be a passive—even if a very important *rôle*," returned the other. "No histrionic ability will be required."

"And may I ask," I remarked, politely, "if I am to be privileged with a part?"

Slowly the woman turned and stared at me.

"I think you will look nice as a deadhead," she murmured.

I winked ostentatiously at Mrs. Drummond; obviously this female must be humoured. But there was no response from her. Somewhat naturally she accepted my *rôle* at its face value.

"This gentleman knows nothing about your wicked game," she burst out. "It's unfair, it's unjust to keep him here."

"To know nothing about the play is always an advantage," returned the other. "However, I grow weary. We will retire, my dear Phyllis—so that we shall both be fresh for the performance."

She led the way to the door, and I was left alone with the man.

"LOOK here, sir," I said, angrily, "this has gone far enough. I admit that what I told you sounds a bit fishy; nevertheless, it happens to be the truth. And I insist upon being allowed to go. Or, if you wish to give me in charge, then send for the police. But this is preposterous. You now know that I am not one of them, whoever 'they' may be."

"And you," he retorted, calmly, "now know altogether too much. So for the purposes of this entertainment—positively for one night only—I fear you will have to be treated as if you were one of them."

He strolled through the door leading to the garage, and I heard the chink of metal against metal as he put the tools back on the bench. My last hope had gone, my last bluff had failed.

I began to tug desperately at the steel bars, until a woman's laugh made me look up suddenly. Irma had returned.

"You can save yourself the trouble, bank clerk," she said, mockingly, and at the sound of her voice Paul returned.

"I suppose we had better gag him, my dear?" he remarked, and she nodded carelessly.

"Yes," she said. "Gag him—and then go."

"This is an outrage," I spluttered, and the next instant he had deftly slipped a gag into my mouth, and then wrapped a handkerchief round me.

"If I hear a sound," he said, quietly, "I shall come down and finish you off on the spot. *Carissima*, you must be tired." He crossed to the woman. "Won't you go to bed?"

"Leave me," she said, curtly. "I shall go in a few minutes."

He went unwillingly, and for a while the woman stood motionless, staring in front of her. The strange look had returned to her eyes; she had forgotten my existence. Noiselessly she moved about on the thick black carpet, the incarnation of grace and beauty. First to one stone and then to another she glided, as a hostess might move round her drawing-room, giving it the finishing touches before the arrival of her guests.

And then at last she paused before the altar-stone. She knelt down, and ran her fingers along underneath it searching for something. At length she found it and pulled it out. It was the photograph of a man.

Fascinated, I watched her as she kissed it passionately: then she placed it on the altar in front of her, and bowed her head as if in prayer. I heard the murmur of her voice, but the actual words I could not distinguish. And after a while I began to feel drowsy. The gleaming white light opposite seemed to be growing bigger and bigger; my head lolled back. And on the instant I was wide awake again.

Part of the roof was glassed in, like the roof of a racquet court, and some of the panes were open for ventilation. And staring through one of the openings was a man. His eyes were fixed on the kneeling woman, his face was inscrutable. Then he glanced at me, and for a brief second our eyes met. In an instant he had disappeared, and I was left trying to fit this new development into the jig-saw. For the man who had been staring through the skylight was the sailor.

Still her voice droned on musically, but I paid no attention. It confirmed, of course, my knowledge that the sailor was one of them, but why should he be on the roof? Spying, presumably; spying on the woman. And when he realized that I had seen him he had disappeared at once for fear I might say something.

"My lover! My God!"

Her words, clear at last, came through the silent room, and once again I looked at her. With her hands clasped together, she was

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rocking to and fro on her knees in front of the photograph.

"To-night I come to you, my beloved."

I closed my eyes. I was dreaming. It was some dreadful nightmare.

"My beloved, I come to you."

The sailor was shouting it; the man who had sprung at me out of the ditch was shouting it; Paul, his face a seething mass of black passion, was shouting it. I was shouting it, too—shouting it better than anyone—shouting it so well and so loudly that the woman herself, Irma, looked into my eyes and praised me. I could feel her fingers on my eyelids; from a great distance she nodded as if satisfied. Then came darkness. I slept.

IT was daylight when I woke, cramped and stiff in every limb. There was a foul taste in my mouth, and I wondered if I had been drugged.

By a stupendous feat of contortion I twisted my head so that I could see my wrist watch, only to find that the damned thing had stopped. Not, I reflected, that it mattered very much what the time was; an odd hour or two this way or that was of little account situated as I was. And after a while I began to curse myself bitterly for having been such an utter fool. If only I hadn't shown myself in the passage: if only——

After a while my thoughts turned in another direction—even less pleasant than the first. What was in store for us? Was it all some grim, fantastic jest, or was it a revenge so terrible that the mere thought of it made me almost sick? Could it be conceivably possible that this foul woman intended to kill Mrs. Drummond in front of us all? And afterwards deal with us?

Faintly through the wall I heard the self-starter being used, and then the car leave the garage. That must be the note going to Darrell and Co. Would they walk into it blindly, or would they take some rudimentary precautions? Would they believe that this woman did really intend to set Mrs. Drummond free if they came? I was powerless to help them in any way, so there wasn't much use worrying.

"Have we slept well?" came a sardonic voice from the door.

Paul, with a sneering smile on his thin lips, was standing there looking at me. Then he came over and removed the handkerchief and the gag. For a time I could only move my jaws stiffly up and down, and make hoarse grunting noises—a thing which seemed to cause him unbounded amusement.

"Damn you," I croaked at last, "did you dope me last night?"

"A very efficacious and but little known narcotic, Mr. Seymour," he remarked, suavely, "was on the handkerchief I put round your mouth. Was your sleep dreamless and refreshing?"

"For God's sake," I muttered, "give me something to drink. My tongue feels like a fungoidal growth."

"A defect, I admit," he said, "in that particular drug. It leaves an unpleasant taste. And so I have much pleasure in telling you that it is on the matter of breakfast that I have come."

There came a little click from behind my chair, and the steel bars slipped off my wrists.

"Stand up," he said. "At the moment the warning is unnecessary, I know; but bear in mind that freedom from your late position does not imply any further concession. So—no monkey tricks."

"Where's that drink?" I muttered.

"All in due course," he returned. "Owing to the fact that certain small preparations have to be made here for our little entertainment to-night, we have to find other accommodation for you to-day. Should you give me the slightest trouble, you wretched interfering little busybody, my finger will connect with the trigger of this revolver and the result will connect with you. So get a move on."

I could feel the muzzle of his gun in the small of my back as he pushed me towards the door. But I didn't care; anything was better than the atrocious discomfort of that stone seat. Moreover, a drink appeared to be looming on the horizon.

The door led into the hall. No one was about, and still in the same position we reached the foot of the stairs.

"Up," he said, curtly.

At a turn in the staircase stood a grandfather clock, and I saw it was half-past nine. So I reckoned I must have slept for five or six hours.

"Through that door," he ordered.

A man I had never seen before rose as we came in.

"Charles has orders," continued the other, "to deal faithfully with you in the event of the slightest trouble. That is so, isn't it, Charles?"

"I'll deal with 'im faithfully, guv'nor," he chuckled. "'E won't try nothing on twice, I gives yer my word. Why, I'd eat a little mess like that."

I gulped down my cup of tea and began to feel better.

"I am sure I shall find him a most entertaining companion," I murmured.

Then he went out, slamming the door behind him, and I began to feel better still.

Anyway, my limbs were free and I'd had

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Fascinated, I watched her as she kissed the photograph passionately.

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something to drink. Moreover, there were cigarettes in my pocket.

"Charles," I said, "will you smoke?"

Charles said "Yus," and I began to take close stock of Charles. And the first and most obvious method of obtaining my release seemed bribery.

I led up to it tactfully, but diplomacy was wasted on Charles. At the mention of the word "money" his face became quite intelligent.

"'Ow much 'ave you?" he demanded.

"About thirty pounds," I answered. "It's yours here and now if you'll let me go, and then there's nothing to prevent you clearing out yourself."

"Let's see the colour of it," he said, and with a wild hope surging up in me I pulled out my pocket-book.

"There you are," I cried. "Twenty-eight pounds."

He slipped the bundle into his pocket, and I stood up.

"Is it safe now to go?" I said, eagerly.

"Go where?"

"Out of the house, as you promised."

"Naughty, naughty," he said, reproachfully. "Do you mean to say that that there money was hintended as a bribe?"

"You confounded scoundrel," I spluttered. "Give me back my notes."

Charles became convulsed with an internal upheaval that apparently indicated laughter.

"Yer know, matey," he said when he could at last speak, "I didn't know that they let things like you out of a 'ome."

Once more the convulsion seized him, and a dull overmastering rage began to rise within me. The limit of my endurance had been reached. I felt I didn't care what happened.

And suddenly I saw red. I sprang at my tormentor and hit him with all my force in the face. Then while he was still too surprised to move I got in a real purler with the teapot over his right eye. And after that I frankly admit I don't remember much more. I recall that he did not remain too surprised to move for long. I recall seeing something that gleamed in his hand, and feeling a searing, burning pain in my forearm. I also recall that an object which felt like a steam-hammer hit my jaw. Then—a blank.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH SOME OF THE OTHERS JOIN ME.

WHEN I came to myself I was back in the room below, fastened to the same seat as before. The filthy taste was in my mouth again, so I guessed they had used the narcotic on me once more. But this time that wasn't my only trouble. My jaw felt as if it had been broken; and my arm, which someone had bound up roughly, ached intolerably.

The room was absolutely silent, and after a time I forced my brain to work. I was alone; I was ungagged. Supposing I shouted for help. There was a bare chance that I might be heard by some stray passer-by.

"Help!" I roared at the pitch of my lungs. "Help!"

A huge black hand suddenly materialized from nowhere—a hand with the fingers curved like a bird's talon. I stared at it fascinated, as it moved gently towards my throat. And this time I nearly screamed in sheer terror.

The fingers closed round my throat, and began playing with it. Still quite gently; no force was used. But every touch of those fingers gave its own message of warning.

As suddenly as it had appeared it went, and I sat there sweating and silent. So I was not alone; somewhere behind me, out of sight, was that cursed nigger Pedro. And as if he had read my thoughts there came from above my head a hideous throaty chuckle. Then silence once again. Gradually I grew calmer, though the thought of that great black brute lurking behind me was horrible.

To distract my mind, I studied the room with closer attention. I could see more than half, and I wondered what the small preparations were that Paul had spoken of. As far as I could see nothing was changed; the same stones, the same carpet. And then it struck me that on one of the stone seats was what looked like a block of wood. It was about the size of a box of a hundred cigarettes, and a cord stuck out from one end on to the carpet.

I looked at the other seats; a similar block was on each one of them. And by pushing myself backwards in my own, I could feel the sharp edge against my spine.

By twisting my head I could just see the cord attached to it. It was a long one, and I followed it idly with my eyes across the carpet until it disappeared behind the next stone.

Round and round in my head ran the ceaseless question—what was going to happen that night? What was going to be done to us? Did that woman really mean all she had implied, or had it been a jest made to frighten Mrs. Drummond?

After a while I dozed off, only to wake up sweating from an appalling dream in which two of the great stones were being used to crush my head by the nigger. Vaguely I heard odd sounds: the car in the garage, a man's voice in the hall; but they seemed to

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come from a long way off. And the only real things in my mental outlook were those cursed white stones.

They moved after a while, passing me in a ceaseless procession. And something else moved, too—a great black form that flitted between them peering and examining. Twice did I see it, and the second time I forced myself back to reality.

It was the negro, and he seemed intensely interested in everything—almost childishly so. He touched stone after stone with his fingers; then he picked up one of the little blocks that I had noticed and examined it closely, grunting under his breath.

Suddenly he straightened up and stood listening. Then with a quick movement he replaced the block, and vanished behind me just as the door into the hall opened and Paul came in. He crossed to my stone and stood looking down at me, while I feigned sleep. And after a time he too began to stroll round amongst the other stones.

He examined each of the blocks, and the cords that ran from them. And as I watched him out of the corner of my eye I noticed a thing I had missed before. On the altar-stone was a little black box, and all the cords appeared to lead to it. He seemed particularly interested in that box, but in the bad light I couldn't see what he was doing. At length, however, he put it down, and lighting a cigarette once more came and stood in front of me. I looked up at him dully.

"I really am rather interested in you," he said at length. "It would be most devilish funny if you really have got nothing to do with them."

"I tell you that I don't know what you are talking about," I cried. "You're making a fearful mistake. I don't know who you mean by 'them.'"

He began to chuckle.

"'Pon my soul," he said, "I'm almost beginning to think that you don't. Which makes the jest excessively rich."

"A positive scream," I agreed, sarcastically. "Would it be too much to hope that I might be permitted to share it?"

"You will in time, I promise you," he went on. "And then you will see how terribly funny it all is. I must say," he continued seriously, almost more to himself than to me, "I did think yesterday that you and the butterfly gentleman were mixed up in it."

"I wish to Heaven," I said, wearily, "that you would realize that I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about. And I further wish you to be under no delusions as to what I'm going to do when I do manage to get out of this place."

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I shall go straight to the police," I said, "and lodge a summons against you for assault and battery. And as for that cursed ruffian upstairs——"

"Poor Charles," he remarked. "You dotted him one with the teapot all right. Well, thank you for your kindly warning. You'll have some other privileged spectators coming to join you soon—three of them."

HE strolled to the door, and looked back as he reached it.

"I can keep no secrets from you, bank clerk," he said. "Do you see those little blocks in the seats?"

"Yes," I said.

"There is one in yours, just behind you."

"I've felt it already," I remarked.

"Well, be very careful how you feel it," he said, gently. "Do nothing rough with it. Because it happens to be gun-cotton. Admittedly a safe explosive—but one never knows."

"Gun-cotton!" I stammered at length. "Good God! man—are you joking?"

He smiled genially. "The fact of the matter is, bank clerk, that you have butted your head into some rather dirty work. But"—he shrugged his shoulders—"when the ladies get ideas in their charming heads, who are we to gainsay them."

"If by the ladies you allude to that partially demented female who was talking such infernal rot last night," I said, grimly, "I'll tell you one idea that she has got wedged in hers. She's got about as much use for you as a Cockney has for a haggis."

"I don't understand you," he said, softly, but I noticed that he was standing very still.

"Then I'll make myself clearer," I remarked. "You cut no ice with her, Paul; she loathes the sight of your face. I watched her last night when you were pulling out the knee-clutching business, and her expression was that of one who contemplates a bad egg from close range."

"You are pleased to be insolent, Mr. Seymour."

"I am pleased to be nothing, you flat-headed skate," I answered. It struck me that a little of Drummond's vocabulary might assist. "But if you imagine that after you've done whatever fool tricks you are going to do, you're then going to land the beauteous lady, you're making the deuce of an error."

"But for the fact," he remarked after a time, "that the death you are going to die is such a particularly choice one, I would strangle you here and now for those words."

"Doesn't alter the fact that she loathes the sight of your face, laddie," I mocked. "And I certainly don't blame her."

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He sprang across the room towards me, and but for the interruption I believe he would have carried out his threat. As it was he managed to control himself with a monstrous effort as the door opened and the woman herself came in.

"Quick, Paul," she cried. "They are coming—the three of them. Where's Pedro? Charles is here, but we want the nigger. And gag that fool of a clerk."

He stuffed a gag into my mouth, and glared at me.

"One sound, and I'll knife you," he muttered. "Pedro!"

He looked over my shoulder.

"Where is the damned fool?" he said, irritably. "I've hardly seen him the whole day. Pedro!"

There was a guttural grunt, and then the huge nigger shambled past me. His head was down, and in the dim light he looked a terrifying sight.

"Get behind the curtains, Pedro. And don't kill. We want them alive in the chairs. Charles—get the other side of the door."

Sick with anxiety I waited. Could nothing be done to warn them? They were walking straight into the trap, and suddenly the full realization of our position seemed to strike me. Drummond couldn't fight half-a-dozen men, especially when two of them had the strength of the negro and the one called Charles.

The woman had left the room; the three men were hiding behind the curtains, so to all appearances, except for myself, it was empty. And then I heard Darrell's voice in the hall.

"So we meet again, madame," he said, gravely. "As you probably know, we have come without informing anyone, trusting that you will keep your side of the bargain."

"Quite like old times seeing you," she answered. "And Mr. Jerningham and Mr. Longworth, too."

"Shall we cut the conversation, madame?" he remarked. "At your instigation three men—one of whom was Hugh himself—have been foully murdered. So you will pardon me if I say that the sooner you hand Mrs. Drummond over to us the better I shall be pleased. In your letter you said that your revenge was sufficient. Let us then be done with it."

"We seem much milder than of yore," she mocked.

"You have Mrs. Drummond in your power," he said, simply. "We have no alternative. Well, madame, we are waiting."

"Yes, *mes amis*, you are right," she answered after a pause. "We will be done with it. You shall have Phyllis. And believe me I am almost sorry now that I

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ever started it. Moods change. A few weeks ago there was nothing I desired more than the deaths of all of you. To-day I regret the Mere. Come this way."

"One moment, madame. Does she know that her husband is dead?"

"No—she does not. Mr. Darrell, it is easy to say, I know, but I wish he were not."

"A pity you didn't think of that a little earlier, madame," he said, grimly. "Where are we to go? Why cannot Mrs. Drummond be handed over to us in this hall?"

"You will soon see why," she answered, appearing in the door. "Besides, I particularly want to show you all this room."

As she had doubtlessly anticipated, they paused inside the door, completely taken off their guard by the strangeness of their surroundings.

"What on earth——" began Jerningham, and even as he spoke the three hidden men sprang on them.

In a few seconds it was all over. Paul had a revolver in Jerningham's neck. Charles gave the same attention to Darrell. And poor little Algy Longworth was the negro's share. He was merely picked up like a kicking baby and deposited in a seat. Then the steel bars were turned and he sat there glowering.

"So it was a trick, was it?" said Darrell, quietly, when at length they were all forced into the stone seats.

The woman began to shake with laughter.

"You fools," she cried, "you brainless fools! Did you really imagine that I was going to hand Phyllis over to you and let you walk out of the house? You must be mad."

She turned on Charles and the nigger.

"Go; get out. But be at hand in case I want you. Paul—you can ungag the bank clerk."

Her glance roved from one to the other of us.

I got in a real purler with the tea-pot over his right eye.

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"Four," she said, musingly. "And there should have been six."

Her eyes were beginning to glitter feverishly; and as she stood in the centre of the room her body swayed gracefully from side to side as if she were dancing.

"Still, we must make do with four, I suppose," she went on.

"Where is Phyllis Drummond?" said Jerningham.

She turned and looked at him dreamily.

"Phyllis is waiting," she answered. "For days she has been waiting for you to come, and now very soon she will join you."

"And what then?" snapped Darrell.

"Why, then, *mon ami*, you shall all go on a journey together. A long journey. Ah! if only Hugh were here; if only my circle were complete! Then indeed the reunion would be a wonderful one."

And now the crazy glitter in her eyes grew more pronounced, till I marvelled that the man called Paul could ever have hoped for any return for his love. The woman was frankly crazy, and stealing a glance at him I saw that he was staring at her with a dawning horror in his face.

"*Carissima*," he muttered. "I beseech of you, do not excite yourself."

"But as it is we shall have to make do with four." Her voice had risen. "Four instead of six. And the principal guest not here. Why—the whole lot of you could go if only Drummond were here. But I did my best, Carl—I did my best."

She had turned to the altar-stone, and was speaking to it. She threw herself across the stone, her arms outstretched, and for a space there was silence in the darkening room. Then abruptly she rose and swept to the door.

"At nine o'clock, Paul, we will begin."

"LOOK here," I said, when she had gone, "Paul—or whatever your name is—what is the good of going on with this?"

He stared at me dully.

"The woman is clean plumb crazy. She is as mad as a hatter. So what are you going to get out of it? You can't marry a mad woman; you can't even make love to her."

"She'll be all right—after," he said at length. "Quite all right—after."

He turned towards the door, and in desperation I played my last card.

"You poor ass," I cried, "there isn't going to be an after for her. When she has finished us, she's going to commit suicide. And whatever you choose to do with a lunatic, you're stung good and strong with a corpse."

It was no good. He opened the door and went out. In fact, I doubt if he even heard what I said, and with a feeling of sick despair I looked at the others.

"So they haven't spotted you, Dixon," said Darrell in a low voice.

"Not yet," I answered. "I don't think it ever dawned on them that I was one of the three they think were drowned at the Mere. But why in Heaven's name did you fellows walk into it so easily?"

"Because Drummond told us to," answered Darrell, calmly.

"Told you to?" I echoed in amazement.

"A short note," he said. "Just—'Follow the messenger—all three of you. Be surprised at nothing. And tell Dixon that he must not reveal my identity until he hears the Frothblowers' Anthem whistled once.'"

"He knows I'm here?" I cried. "But I don't understand."

"Frankly—no more do I," said Algy. "What's this damned stone quarry?"

"It's a model," I said, "of Stonehenge. Look here, you fellows, I'll tell you all I know. I can pretend that we are strangers if anyone comes in. But there is no reason why we shouldn't talk, in view of the position we are in—it's most damnably serious."

"Fire ahead," said Jerningham, quietly.

I told them everything; what I knew and what I only suspected. I told them of the dead man at Stonehenge, and the scene of the night before. And they listened with consternation growing on their faces.

We argued it from every angle whilst the room grew darker and darker. To them the only thing that mattered was that Drummond had told them to come; that Drummond had something up his sleeve. But, try as I would, I couldn't share their optimism. What could he do alone—or at best with Toby Sinclair to help him? The odds were altogether too heavy. Had we all been free it would have been different. Then we could have put up a good show; as it was the thing seemed hopeless to me. And yet he had deliberately told these three to walk into the trap. It was incomprehensible.

It appeared that they had not seen him, but had only received the note. And the previous night Algy Longworth had also got a note which explained his movements to me. It had contained instructions to the effect that he was to announce publicly his intention of going to Stonehenge after dinner; that as he valued his life he was not to go, but was to take a walk in the opposite direction.

"If I had gone," he said, "I suppose I

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should have shared the fate of the poor devil you saw dead. I wonder who he was?"

No one answered; only the throaty chuckle that I had heard before came from somewhere behind me.

"It's the nigger," grunted Darrell. "Get out, you filthy brute."

He chuckled again, and then like some monstrous misshapen animal he began to shamble round the room. I could just see him in the darkness peering first at one thing and then at another. He went to the two unoccupied seats and began fiddling with the mechanism that moved the two curved steel bars. He worked it several times, chuckling to himself like a child, and suddenly came Jerningham's voice strained and tense.

"Come and do that to my chair, nigger. I'll give you some cigarettes and money if you do."

But the black man took no notice. He had transferred his attentions now to the black box that lay upon the altar-stone. That occupied him for a long while, and all the time the throaty chuckling continued. Every now and then came the chink of tin on stone. Then, as silently as he had come, he vanished again.

It was the suspense of waiting that was so appalling, and I began to long for nine o'clock. Anything—so long as they got on with it. And as if in answer to my thoughts the door leading into the hall slowly opened, and a clock outside began to chime.

"Nine," muttered somebody.

The final act was about to begin.

(*To be concluded.*)

ACROSTICS.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 180.

THE writer penned his tale with matchless art:
Autobiography it is, in part.

1. A hill near lovely city we trisect,
   The central third alone we then select.
2. Perfect it is, and frequently in sight:
   One line of Kipling will locate the light.
3. Not quite all there at times, the bird we meet—
   Sometimes possessing, sometimes lacking feet.
4. The poet called him Pundit of the East,
   Arch-hypocrite, an augur and a priest.
5. Those that were fat were eaten by the lean,
   And still no fatter were the latter seen.
6. If with her boy confused she were to be,
   It still would be herself that you would see.
7. A fellow with some cash is evident,
   A fearful fellow in his element.
8. Half French, half Scotch; a plant bereft of head
   Is synonym. Let head and tail be shed.
9. A master thief, wily he was and slim,
   And now his sweetheart steals away from him.

PAX.

Answers to Acrostic No. 180 *should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor,* THE STRAND MAGAZINE, *Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on July* 10*th.*

Two answers may be sent to every light.

It is essential that solvers, with their answers to this acrostic, should send also their real names and addresses.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 179.

(*The Third of the Series.*)

SWEET scented flowers, whose fragrance sheds
An added charm o'er garden-beds.

1. Like lion enters, lamb-like goes,
   And such a hare is mad, one knows.
2. If this is bliss, we may surmise
   That it is folly to be wise.
3. By angry sound a dog declares
   That he for what's inside prepares.
4. A son of Jacob. Sleepy chap?
   At least he always has a nap.
5. A perfume sweet, a German name,
   Read either way it is the same.
6. He has a list, he makes a plot,
   He may be Dickens, Hardy, Scott.
7. Runs round the earth, but is not seen,
   A line that oft is crossed, I mean.
8. Terrific storm, you will agree,
   If roofs are torn, ado there'll be.
9. A stumble, or gay way to go
   Upon the light fantastic toe.
10. To do so, folk in older days
    For Gretna Green would hire a chaise.

BOODLEBAR.

1. M	a r c	H
2. I	g n o r a n c	E
3. G	r o w	L
4. N	a p h t a l	I
5. O	t t	O
6. N	o v e l i s	T
7. E	q u a t o	R
8. T	o r n a d	O
9. T	r i	P
10. E	l o p	E

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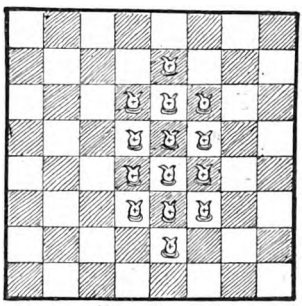
PERPLEXITIES.

By HENRY E. DUDENEY.

914.—BISHOPS AND THEIR SEES.



In the diagram fourteen Bishops are seen in convocation. When each Bishop has returned to his See no Bishop will be in view of another. In other words they will be so settled that, in chess language, no Bishop will then be attacking another. Can you take them all home in as few Bishop moves as possible?

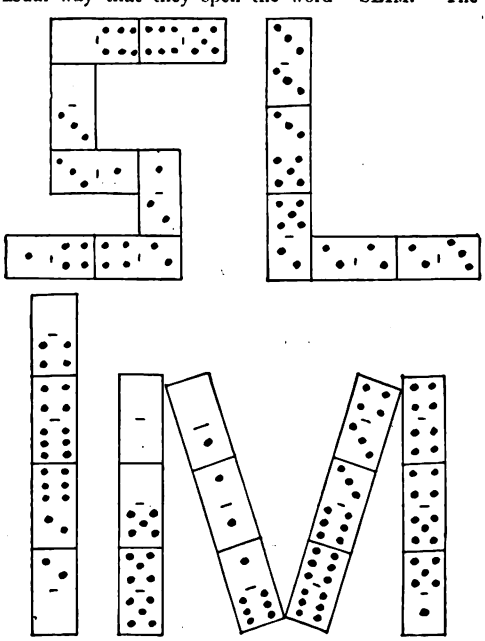
915.—LETTER FIGURE PUZZLE.

A CORRESPONDENT (C. E. B.) sends me the following, which will, I think, be found interesting and is not difficult if properly attacked.

A×B=B, B×C=AC, C×D=BC, D×E=CH, E×F=DK, F×H=CJ, H×J=KJ, J×K=E, K×L=L, A×L=L. Every letter represents a different digit and, of course, AC, BC, etc., are two-figure numbers. Can you find the values in figures of all the letters?

916.—SLIM DOMINOES.

THE twenty-eight dominoes are so arranged with one against one, two against two, and so on in the usual way that they spell the word "SLIM." The



puzzle is to form the letters in exactly the same way but so that every letter shall contain the same number of pips. At present the number in each letter is different.

917.—FOOTBALL NEWS.

HERE is an item from the football news in a certain paper:—

"Smith, the famous centre-forward, at first thought he would —— but later he was led to alter his decision and —— instead."

Can you substitute words for the two blanks so as to make sense of the announcement? Each word is spelt exactly alike but the two meanings are different.

918.—SQUARING THE DIGITS.

TAKE nine counters numbered 1 to 9 and place them in a row as shown. It is required in as few exchanges of pairs as possible to convert this into a

square number. As an example in six pairs I give the following: 7 8 (exchanging 7 and 8), 8 4, 4 6, 6 9, 9 3, 3 2, which gives us the number 139854276, which is the square of 11826. But it can be done in fewer moves.

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

910.—AN EFFERVESCENT PUZZLE.

THE answer to the first case is 88,200 ways. There is an easy way of getting the answer, but it would require too much space to explain it in detail. In the second case the answer is reduced to 6,300 ways.

911.—WATER MEASUREMENT.

Two pints may be measured in fourteen transactions as below, where the vessels above the line are empty and every other row shows a transaction.

7	11		
7	0	0	10
0	7	7	10
7	7	6	11
3	11	6	0
3	0	0	6
0	3	7	6
7	3	2	11

The contents of the vessels after each transaction will make everything clear.

912.—CREMATED ANIMALS.

THE words in their order are as follows:—

(1) W-A-SP, (2) P-I-G, (3) SALM-ON, (4) 'S-LUG, (5) W-OR-M, (6) HO-UN-D, (7) OY'S-TER, (8) W-REN, (9) P-ON-Y, (10) SE-AL, (11) RAVE-N, (12) FER-RET, (13) H-OR-SE, (14) F-LEA, (15) L-I-ON, (16) S-WAN, (17) D-ON-KEY, (18) CAME-L.

913.—SUMMING THE DIGITS.

THERE are several ways of attacking this puzzle, and the answer is 201599999798400. The sum of the digits is 45 and $45\times\lfloor 8=90\times 4\lfloor 7=90\times 20160=1814400$.

Now write down 1 8 1 4 4

1 8 1 4 4

1 8 1 4 4

1 8 1 4 4

to nine places, add up and put 00 at the end, and there is the answer.

900.—THE LETTER L.

IN my solution I assumed that the 6 and 9 were distinguishable from their inversions. If not, we must deduct $7\times 576=4032$ from 40320 and the correct answer will be 36288.

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The STRAND MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1928.

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The Reverent Wooing of Archibald

By P. G. WODEHOUSE

Illustrated by
CHAS. CROMBIE

THE conversation in the bar-parlour of the Anglers' Rest, which always tends to get deepish towards closing-time, had turned to the subject of the Modern Girl: and a Gin-and-Ginger-ale sitting in the corner by the window remarked that it was strange how types die out.

"I can remember the days," said the Gin-and-Ginger-ale, "when every other girl you met stood about six feet two in her dancing-shoes and had as many curves as a scenic railway. Now they are all five foot nothing and you can't see them sideways. Why is this?"

The Draught Stout shook his head.

"Nobody can say. It's the same with dogs. One moment the world is full of pugs as far as the eye can reach; the next, not a pug in sight, only Pekes and Alsatians. Odd!"

The Small Bass and the Double-Whisky-and-Splash admitted that these things were very mysterious and supposed we should never know the reason for them. Probably we were not meant to know.

"I cannot agree with you, gentlemen," said Mr. Mulliner. He had been sipping his hot Scotch and lemon with a rather abstracted air; but now he sat up alertly, prepared to deliver judgment. "The reason for the disappearance of the dignified, queenly type of girl is surely obvious. It is Nature's method of ensuring the continuance of the species. A world full of the sort of young woman that Meredith used to put into his novels and du Maurier into his pictures in *Punch* would be a world full of permanent spinsters. The modern young man would never be able to summon up the nerve to propose to them."

"Something in that," assented the Draught Stout.

"I speak with authority on the point," said Mr. Mulliner, "because my nephew Archibald made me his confidant when he fell in love with Aurelia Cammarleigh. He worshipped that girl with a fervour which threatened to unseat his reason, such as it was; but the mere idea of asking her to be his wife gave him, he informed me, such a feeling of faintness that only by means of a very stiff brandy-and-soda, or some similar restorative, was he able to pull himself together on the occasions when he contemplated it. Had it not been for . . . But perhaps you would care to hear the story from the beginning?"

PEOPLE who enjoyed a merely superficial acquaintance with my nephew Archibald (said Mr. Mulliner) were accustomed to set him down as just an ordinary pinheaded young man. It was only when they came to know him better that they discovered their mistake.

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Then they realized that his pinheadedness, so far from being ordinary, was exceptional. Even at the Drones Club, where the average of intellect is not high, it was often said of Archibald that, had his brain been constructed of silk, he would have been hard put to it to find sufficient material to make a canary a pair of stockings. He sauntered through life with a cheerful insouciance, and up to the age of twenty-five had only once been moved by anything in the nature of a really strong emotion—on the occasion when, in the heart of Bond Street and at the height of the London season, he discovered that his man, Meadows, had carelessly sent him out with odd spats on.

And then he met Aurelia Cammarleigh.

The first encounter between these two has always seemed to me to bear an extraordinary resemblance to the famous meeting between the poet Dante and Beatrice Portinari. Dante, if you remember, exchanged no remarks with Beatrice on that occasion. Nor did Archibald with Aurelia. Dante just goggled at the girl. So did Archibald. Like Archibald, Dante loved at first sight: and the poet's age at the time was, we are told, nine—which was almost exactly the mental age of Archibald Mulliner when he first set eyeglass on Aurelia Cammarleigh.

Only in the actual locale of the encounter do the two cases cease to be parallel. Dante, the story relates, was walking on the Ponte Vecchia, while Archibald Mulliner was having a thoughtful cocktail in the window of the Drones Club, looking out on Dover Street.

And he had just relaxed his lower jaw in order to examine Dover Street more comfortably, when there swam into his line of vision something that looked like a Greek goddess who, contrary to the usual practice of Greek goddesses, had had time to put some clothes on. She came out of a shop opposite the club, and stood on the pavement waiting for a taxi. And, as he saw her standing there, love at first sight seemed to go all over Archibald Mulliner like the nettlerash.

IT was strange that this should have been so, for she was not at all the sort of girl with whom Archibald had fallen in love at first sight in the past. I chanced, while in here the other day, to pick up a copy of one of the old yellowback novels of fifty years ago—the property, I believe, of Miss Postlethwaite, our courteous and erudite barmaid. It was entitled "Sir Ralph's Secret," and its heroine, the Lady Elaine, was described as a superbly handsome girl, divinely tall, with a noble figure, the arched Montresor nose, haughty eyes beneath delicately-pencilled brows, and that indefinable air of aristocratic aloofness which marks the daughter of a hundred Earls. And Aurelia Cammarleigh might have been this formidable creature's double.

Yet Archibald, sighting her, reeled as if the cocktail he had just consumed had been his tenth, instead of his first.

"Golly!" said Archibald.

To save himself from falling, he had clutched at a passing fellow-member; and now, examining his catch, he saw that it was young Algy Wymondham-Wymondham. Just the fellow-member he would have preferred to clutch at, for Algy was a man who went everywhere and knew everybody and could doubtless give him the information he desired.

"Algy, old prune," said Archibald, in a low, throaty voice. "A moment of your valuable time, if you don't mind."

He paused, for he had perceived the need for caution. Algy was a notorious babbler, and it would be the height of rashness to give him an inkling of the passion which blazed within his breast. With a strong effort he donned the mask. When he spoke again it was with a deceiving nonchalance.

"I was just wondering if you happened to know who that girl is across the street there. Seems to me I've met her somewhere or something or seen her or something. Or something, if you know what I mean."

Algy followed his pointing finger and was in time to observe Aurelia as she disappeared into the cab.

"That girl?"

"Yes," said Archibald, yawning. "Who is she, if any?"

"Girl named Cammarleigh."

"Ah!" said Archibald, yawning again. "Then I haven't met her."

"Introduce you if you like. She's sure to be at Ascot. Look out for us there."

Archibald yawned for the third time.

"All right," he said, "I'll try to remember. Tell me about her. I mean, has she any fathers or mothers or any rot of that description?"

"Only an aunt. She lives with her in Park Street. She's potty."

Archibald started, stung to the quick.

"Potty? That divine—I mean, that rather attractive-looking girl?"

"Not Aurelia. The aunt. She thinks Bacon wrote Shakespeare."

"Thinks who wrote what?" asked Archibald, puzzled, for the names were strange to him.

"You must have heard of Shakespeare. He's well known. Fellow who used to write plays. Only Aurelia's aunt says he didn't. She maintains that a bloke called Bacon wrote them for him."

"Dashed decent of him," said Archibald,

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approvingly. "Of course, he may have owed Shakespeare money."

"There's that, of course."

"What was the name again?"

"Bacon."

"Bacon," said Archibald, jotting it down on his cuff. "Right."

Algy moved on, and Archibald, his soul bubbling within him like a welsh rabbit at the height of its fever, sank into a chair and stared sightlessly at the ceiling. Then, rising, he went off to the Burlington Arcade to buy socks.

The process of buying socks eased for awhile the turmoil that ran riot in Archibald's veins. But even socks with violet clocks can only alleviate; they do not cure. Returning to his rooms, he found the anguish rather more overwhelming than ever. For at last he had leisure to think; and thinking always hurt his head.

Algy's careless words had confirmed his worst suspicions. A girl with an aunt who knew all about Shakespeare and Bacon must of necessity live in a mental atmosphere into which a lame-brained bird like himself could scarcely hope to soar. Even if he did meet her—even if she asked him to call—even if in due time their relations became positively cordial, what then? How could he aspire to such a goddess? What had he to offer her?

To save himself from falling he clutched at a passing fellow-member.

Money?

Plenty of that, yes; but what was money?

Socks?

Of these he had the finest collection in London, but socks are not everything.

A loving heart?

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A fat lot of use that was.

No; a girl like Aurelia Cammarleigh would, he felt, demand from the man who aspired to her hand something in the nature of gifts, of accomplishments. He would have to be a man who Did Things.

And what, Archibald asked himself, could he do? Absolutely nothing except give an imitation of a hen laying an egg.

That he could do. At imitating a hen laying an egg he was admittedly a master. His fame in that one respect had spread all over the West-end of London. "Others abide our question. Thou art free," was the verdict of London's gilded youth on Archibald Mulliner when considered purely in the light of a man who could imitate a hen laying an egg. "Mulliner," they said to one another, "may be a pretty total loss in many ways, but he can imitate a hen laying an egg."

And, so far from helping him, this one accomplishment of his would, reason told him, be a positive handicap. A girl like Aurelia Cammarleigh would simply be sickened by such coarse buffoonery. He blushed at the very thought of her ever learning that he was capable of sinking to such depths.

And so, when some weeks later he was introduced to her in the paddock at Ascot, and she, gazing at him with what seemed to his sensitive mind contemptuous loathing, said:—

"They tell me you give an imitation of a hen laying an egg, Mr. Mulliner,"

He replied with extraordinary vehemence:

"It is a lie—a foul and contemptible lie which I shall track to its source and nail to the counter."

Brave words! But had they clicked? Had she believed him? He trusted so. But her haughty eyes were very penetrating. They seemed to pierce through to the depths of his soul and lay it bare for what it was—the soul of a hen-imitator.

However, she did ask him to call. With a sort of queenly, bored disdain, and only after he had asked twice if he might—but she did it. And Archibald resolved that, no matter what the mental strain, he would show her that her first impression of him had been erroneous; that, trivial and vapid though he might seem, there were in his nature deeps whose existence she had not suspected.

For a young man who had been superannuated from Eton and believed everything he read in the Racing Expert's column in the morning paper, Archibald, I am bound to admit, exhibited in this crisis a sagacity for which few of his intimates would have given him credit. It may be that love stimulates the mind, or it may be that when the moment comes Blood will tell. Archibald, you must remember, was, after all, a Mulliner: and now the old resourceful strain of the Mulliners came out in him.

"Meadows," he said to Meadows, his man.

"Sir?" said Meadows.

"It appears," said Archibald, "that there is—or was—a cove of the name of Shakespeare. Also a second cove of the name of Bacon. And Bacon wrote plays, it seems, and Shakespeare went and put his own name on the programme and copped the credit."

"Indeed, sir?"

"If true, not right, Meadows."

"Far from it, sir."

"Very well, then. I wish to go into this matter carefully. Kindly pop out and get me a book or two bearing on the business."

HE had planned his campaign with infinite cunning. He knew that, before anything could be done in the direction of winning the heart of Aurelia Cammarleigh, he must first establish himself solidly with the aunt. He must court the aunt, ingratiate himself with her—always, of course, making it clear from the start that she was not the one. And if reading about Shakespeare and Bacon could do it, he would, he told himself, have her eating out of his hand in a week.

Meadows returned with a parcel of forbidding-looking volumes, and Archibald put in a fortnight's intensive study. Then, discarding the monocle which had up till then been his constant companion and substituting for it a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles which gave him something of the look of an earnest sheep, he set out for Park Street to pay his first call. And within five minutes of his arrival he had declined a cigarette on the plea that he was a non-smoker and had managed to say some rather caustic things about the practice, so prevalent among his contemporaries, of drinking cocktails.

Life, said Archibald, toying with his tea-cup, was surely given to us for some better purpose than the destruction of our brains and digestion with alcohol. Bacon, for instance, never took a cocktail in his life, and look at him.

At this the aunt, who up till now had plainly been regarding him as just another of those unfortunate incidents, sprang to life.

"You admire Bacon, Mr. Mulliner?" she asked eagerly.

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And, reaching out an arm like the tentacle of an octopus, she drew him into a corner and talked about Cryptograms for forty-seven minutes by the drawing-room clock. In short, to sum the thing up, my nephew Archibald, at his initial meeting with the only relative of the girl he loved, went like a breeze. A Mulliner is always a Mulliner. Apply the acid test, and he will meet it.

It was not long after this that he informed me that he had sown the good seed to such an extent that Aurelia's aunt had invited him to pay a long visit to her country house, Brawstead Towers, in Sussex.

He was seated at the Savoy bar when he told me this, rather feverishly putting himself outside a Scotch and soda; and I was perplexed to note that his face was drawn and his eyes haggard.

"But you do not seem happy, my boy," I said.

"I'm not happy."

"But surely this should be an occasion for rejoicing. Thrown together as you will be in the pleasant surroundings of a country house, you ought easily to find an opportunity of asking this girl to marry you."

"And a lot of good that will be," said Archibald, moodily. "Even if I do get a chance I sha'n't be able to make any use of it. I wouldn't have the nerve. You don't seem to realize what it means being in love with a girl like Aurelia. When I look into those clear, soulful eyes or see that perfect profile bobbing about on the horizon a sense of my unworthiness seems to slosh me amidships like some blunt instrument. My tongue gets entangled with my front teeth, and all I can do is stand there feeling like a piece of Gorgonzola that has been condemned by the local sanitary inspector. I'm going to Brawstead Towers, yes, but I don't expect anything to come of it. I know exactly what's going to happen to me. I shall just buzz along through life, pining dumbly, and in the end slide into the tomb a blasted, blighted bachelor. Another whisky, please, and jolly well make it a double."

BRAWSTEAD TOWERS, situated as it is in the pleasant Weald of Sussex, stands some fifty miles from London; and Archibald, taking the trip easily in his car, arrived there in time to dress comfortably for dinner. It was only when he reached the drawing-room at eight o'clock that he discovered that the younger members of the house-party had gone off in a body to dine and dance at a hospitable neighbour's, leaving him to waste the evening tie of a lifetime, to the composition of which he had devoted no less than twenty-two minutes, on Aurelia's aunt.

Dinner in these circumstances could hardly hope to be an unmixedly exhilarating function. Among the things which helped to differentiate it from a Babylonian orgy was the fact that, in deference to his known prejudice, no wine was served to Archibald. And, lacking artificial stimulus, he found the aunt even harder to endure philosophically than ever.

Archibald had long since come to a definite decision that what this woman needed was an ounce of weed-killer, scientifically administered. With a good deal of adroitness he contrived to head her off from her favourite topic during the meal; but after the coffee had been disposed of she threw off all restraint. Scooping him up and bearing him off into the recesses of the west wing, she wedged him into a corner of a settee and began to tell him all about the remarkable discovery which had been made by applying the Plain Cipher to Milton's well-known Epitaph on Shakespeare.

"The one beginning, 'What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones?'" said the aunt.

"Oh, that one?" said Archibald.

"'What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones? The labour of an Age in piled stones? Or that his hallowed Reliques should be hid under a starry-pointing Pyramid?'" said the Aunt.

Archibald, who was not good at riddles, said he didn't know.

"As in the Plays and Sonnets," said the aunt, "we substitute the name equivalents of the figure totals."

"We do what?"

"Substitute the name equivalents of the figure totals."

"The which?"

"The figure totals."

"All right," said Archibald. "Let it go. I dare say you know best."

The aunt inflated her lungs.

"These figure totals," she said, "are always taken out in the Plain Cipher, A equalling one to Z equals twenty-four. The names are counted in the same way. A capital letter with the figures indicates an occasional variation in the Name Count. For instance, A equals twenty-seven, B twenty-eight, until K equals ten is reached, when K instead of ten becomes one, and T instead of nineteen is one, and R or Reverse and so on, until A equals twenty-four is reached. The short or single Digit is not used here. Reading the Epitaph in the light of this Cipher, it becomes: 'What need Verulam for Shakespeare? Francis Bacon England's King be hid under a W. Shakespeare? William Shakespeare. Fame, what needst Francis Tudor, King of

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England ? Francis. Francis. W. Shakespeare. For Francis thy William Shakespeare hath England's King took W. Shakespeare. Then thou our W. Shakespeare Francis Tudor bereaving Francis Bacon Francis Tudor such a tomb William Shakespeare.' "

The speech to which he had been listening was unusually lucid and simple for a Baconian, yet Archibald, his eye catching a battle-axe that hung on the wall, could not but stifle a wistful sigh. How simple it would have been, had he not been a Mulliner and a gentleman, to remove the weapon from its hook, spit on his hands, and haul off and dot this doddering old ruin one just above the imitation pearl necklace. Placing his twitching hands underneath him and sitting on them, he stayed where he was until, just as the clock on the mantelpiece chimed the hour of midnight, a merciful fit of hiccups on the part of his hostess enabled him to retire. As she reached the twenty-seventh " hic," his fingers found the door-handle and a moment later he was outside, streaking up the stairs.

The room they had given Archibald was at the end of a corridor, a pleasant, airy apartment with French windows opening upon a broad balcony. At any other time he would have found it agreeable to hop out on to this balcony and revel in the scents and sounds of the summer night, thinking the while long, lingering thoughts of Aurelia. But what with all that Francis Tudor Francis Bacon such a tomb William Shakespeare count seventeen drop one knit purl and set them up in the other alley stuff, not even thoughts of Aurelia could keep him from his bed.

Moodily tearing off his clothes and donning his pyjamas, Archibald Mulliner climbed in and instantaneously discovered that the bed was an apple-pie bed. When and how it had happened he did not know, but at a point during the day some loving hand had sewn up the sheets and put two hair-brushes and a branch of some prickly shrub between them.

Himself from earliest boyhood an adept at the construction of booby-traps, Archibald, had his frame of mind been sunnier, would doubtless have greeted this really extremely sound effort with a cheery laugh. As it was, weighed down with Verulams and Francis Tudors, he swore for a while with considerable fervour ; then, ripping off the sheets and tossing the prickly shrub wearily into a corner, he crawled between the blankets and was soon asleep.

His last waking thought was that if the aunt hoped to catch him on the morrow, she would have to be considerably quicker on her pins than her physique indicated.

HOW long Archibald slept he could not have said. He woke some hours later with a vague feeling that a thunderstorm of unusual violence had broken out in his immediate neighbourhood. But this, he realized as the mists of slumber cleared away, was an error. The noise which had disturbed him was not thunder but the sound of someone snoring. Snoring like the dickens. The walls seemed to be vibrating like the deck of an ocean liner.

Archibald Mulliner might have had a tough evening with the aunt, but his spirit was not so completely broken as to make him lie supinely down beneath that snoring. The sound filled him, as snoring fills every right-thinking man, with a seething resentment and a passionate yearning for justice, and he climbed out of bed with the intention of taking the proper steps through the recognized channels. It is the custom nowadays to disparage the educational methods of the English public-school and to maintain that they are not practical and of a kind to fit the growing boy for the problems of after-life. But you do learn one thing at a public school, and that is how to act when somebody starts snoring.

You jolly well grab a cake of soap and pop in and stuff it down the blighter's throat. And this Archibald proposed—God willing—to do. It was the work of a moment with him to dash to the wash-stand and arm himself. Then he moved softly out through the French windows on to the balcony.

The snoring, he had ascertained, proceeded from the next room. Presumably this room also would have French windows ; and presumably, as the night was warm, these would be open. It would be a simple task to oil in, insert the soap, and buzz back undetected.

It was a lovely night, but Archibald paid no attention to it. Clasping his cake of soap, he crept on, and was pleased to discover, on arriving outside the snorer's room, that his surmise had been correct. The windows were open. Beyond them, screening the interior of the room, were heavy curtains. And he had just placed his hand upon these when from inside a voice spoke. At the same moment the light was turned on.

" Who's that ? " said the voice.

And it was as if Brawstead Towers, with all its stabling, outhouses, and messuages, had fallen on Archibald's head. A mist rose before his eyes. He gasped and tottered.

The voice was that of Aurelia Cammarleigh.

For an instant, for a single long, sickening instant, I am compelled to admit that Archibald's love, deep as the sea though it was, definitely wobbled. It had received a grievous blow. It was not simply the

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discovery that the girl he adored was a snorer that unmanned him; it was the thought that she could snore like that. There was something about those snores that had seemed to sin against his whole conception of womanly purity, so eloquent were they of adenoids that should have been removed in infancy and tonsils that ought never to have been allowed to remain untended.

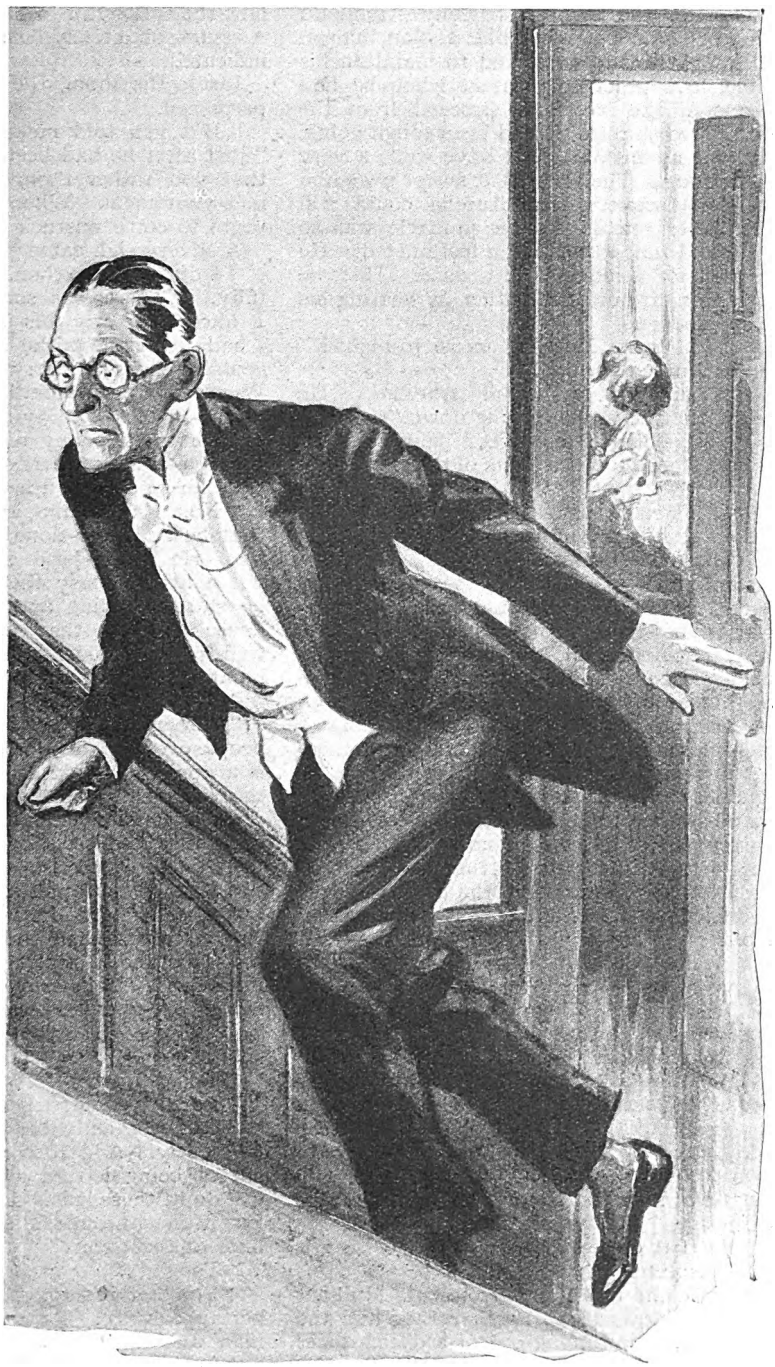
Then he recovered. Even though this girl's slumber was not, as the poet Milton so beautifully puts it, "airy light," but rather reminiscent of a lumber-camp when the wood-sawing is proceeding at its briskest, he loved her still.

He had just reached this conclusion when a second voice spoke inside the room.

"Isay, Aurelia!"

It was the voice of another girl. He perceived now that the question, "Who's that?" had been addressed not to him but to this new-comer fumbling at the door-handle.

"Isay, Aurelia," said the girl, complainingly, "you've simply got to do something about that bally bulldog of yours. I can't possibly get to sleep with him snoring like that. He's making the plaster come down from the ceiling in my room."



A merciful fit of hiccups on the part of his hostess enabled him to retire.

"I'm sorry," said Aurelia. "I've got so used to it that I don't notice."

"Well, I do. Put a green-baize cloth over him or something."

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Out on the moonlit balcony Archibald Mulliner stood shaking like a blancmange. Although he had contrived to maintain his great love practically intact when he had supposed the snores to proceed from the girl he worshipped, it had been tough going, and for an instant, as I have said, a very near thing. The relief that swept over him at the discovery that Aurelia could still justifiably remain on her pinnacle was so profound that it made him feel filleted. He seemed for a moment in a daze. Then he was brought out of the ether by hearing his name spoken.

"Did Archie Mulliner arrive to-night?" asked Aurelia's friend.

"I suppose so," said Aurelia. 'He wired that he was motoring down."

"Just between us girls," said Aurelia's friend, "what do you think of that bird?"

TO listen in on a private conversation — especially a private conversation between two modern girls, when you never know what may come next—is rightly considered an action incompatible with the claim to be a gentleman. I regret to say, therefore, that Archibald, ignoring the fact that he belonged to a family whose code is as high as that of any in the land, instead of creeping away to his room, edged at this point a step closer to the curtains and stood there with his ears flapping. It might be an ignoble thing to eavesdrop, but it was apparent that Aurelia Cammarleigh was about to reveal her candid opinion of him; and the prospect of getting the true facts—straight, as it were, from the horse's mouth—held him so fascinated that he could not move.

"Archie Mulliner?" said Aurelia, meditatively.

"Yes. The betting at the Junior Lipstick is seven to two that you'll marry him."

"Why on earth?"

"Well, people have noticed he's always round at your place, and they seem to think it significant. Anyway, that's how the odds stood when I left London—seven to two."

"Get in on the short end," said Aurelia, earnestly, "and you'll make a packet."

"Is that official?"

"Absolutely," said Aurelia.

Out in the moonlight, Archibald Mulliner uttered a low, bleak moan rather like the last bit of wind going out of a dying duck. True he had always told himself that he hadn't a chance, but, however much a man may say that, he never in his heart really believes it. And now from an authoritative source he had learned that his romance was definitely blue round the edges. It was a shattering blow. He wondered dully how the trains ran to the Rocky Mountains. A spot of grizzly-bear shooting seemed indicated.

Inside the room, the other girl appeared perplexed.

"But you told me at Ascot," she said, "just after he had been introduced to you, that you rather thought you had at last met your ideal. When did the good thing begin to come unstuck?"

A silvery sigh came through the curtains.

"I did think so then," said Aurelia, wistfully. "There was something about him. I liked the way his ears wiggled. And I had always heard he was such a perfectly genial, cheery, merry old soul. Algy Wymondham-Wymondham told me that his imitation of a hen laying an egg was alone enough to keep any reasonable girl happy through a long married life."

"Can he imitate a hen?"

"No. I asked him, and he stoutly denied that he had ever done such a thing in his life. He was quite stuffy about it. I felt a little uneasy then, and the moment he started calling and hanging about the house I knew that my fears had been well-founded. The man is beyond question a flat tyre and a wet smack."

'As bad as that?"

"I'm not exaggerating a bit. Where people ever got the idea that Archie Mulliner is a bonhomous old bean beats me. He is the world's worst monkey-wrench. He doesn't drink cocktails, he doesn't smoke cigarettes, and the thing he seems to enjoy most in the world is to sit for hours listening to the conversation of my aunt, who, as you know, is pure goof from the soles of the feet to the tortoiseshell comb and should long ago have been renting a padded cell in Earlswood. Believe me, Muriel, if you can really get seven to two, you are on to the best thing since Buttercup won the Lincolnshire."

"You don't say!"

"I do say. Apart from anything else, he's got a beastly habit of looking at me reverently. And if you knew how sick I am of being looked at reverently! They will do it, these lads. I suppose it's because I'm rather an out-size and modelled on the lines of Cleopatra."

"Tough!"

"You bet it's tough. A girl can't help her appearance. I may look as if my ideal man was the hero of a Viennese operetta, but I don't feel that way. What I want is some good, sprightly sportsman who sets a neat booby-trap and who'll rush up and grab me in his arms, and say to me, 'Aurelia, old girl, you're the bee's roller-skates!"

And Aurelia Cammarleigh emitted another sigh.

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"Talking of booby-traps," said the other girl, "if Archie Mulliner has arrived he's in the next room, isn't he?"

"I suppose so. That's where he was to be. Why?"

"Because I made him an apple-pie bed."

"It was the right spirit," said Aurelia, warmly. "I wish I'd thought of it myself."

"Too late now."

"Yes," said Aurelia. "But I'll tell you what I can and will do. You say you object to Lysander's snoring. Well, I'll go and pop him in at Archie Mulliner's window. That'll give him pause for thought."

"Splendid," agreed the girl Muriel. "Well, good night."

"Good night," said Aurelia.

There followed the sound of a door closing.

THERE was, as I have indicated, not much of my nephew Archibald's mind, but what there was of it was now in a whirl. He was stunned. Large though his ears were, he could hardly believe them. Like every man who is abruptly called upon to revise his entire scheme of values, he felt as if he had been standing on top of the Eiffel Tower and some practical joker had suddenly drawn it away from under him. Tottering back to his room, he replaced the cake of soap in its dish and sat down on the bed to grapple with this amazing development.

Aurelia Cammarleigh had compared herself to Cleopatra. It is not too much to say that my nephew Archibald's emotions at this juncture were very similar to what Marc Antony's would have been had Egypt's queen risen from her throne at his entry and without a word of warning started to dance the Black Bottom.

He was roused from his thoughts by the sound of a light footstep on the balcony outside. At the same moment he heard a low woofly gruffle, the unmistakable note of a bulldog of regular habits who has been jerked out of his basket in the small hours and forced to take the night air.

"She is coming, my own, my sweet;
Were it never so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthy bed,"

whispered Archibald's soul, or words to that effect. He rose from his seat and paused for an instant, irresolute. Then inspiration descended on him. He knew what to do, and he did it.

Yes, gentlemen, in that supreme crisis of his life, with his whole fate hanging, as you might say, in the balance, Archibald Mulliner, showing for almost the first time in his career a well-nigh human intelligence, began to give his celebrated imitation of a hen laying an egg.

Archibald's imitation of a hen laying an egg was conceived on broad and sympathetic lines. Less violent than Salvini's Othello, it had in it something of the poignant wistfulness of Mrs. Siddons in the sleep-walking scene of "Macbeth." The rendition started quietly, almost inaudibly, with a sort of soft, liquid crooning—the joyful yet half-incredulous murmur of a mother who can scarcely believe as yet that her union has really been blessed, and that it is indeed she who is responsible for that oval mixture of chalk and albumen which she sees lying beside her in the straw.

Then, gradually, conviction comes.

"It looks like an egg," one seems to hear her say. "It feels like an egg. It's shaped like an egg. Damme, it *is* an egg!"

And at that, all doubting resolved, the crooning changes; takes on a firmer note; soars into the upper register; and finally swells into a maternal pæan of joy—a "Charawk-chawk-chawk-chawk" of such a calibre that few had ever been able to listen to it dry-eyed. Following which, it was Archibald's custom to run round the room, flapping the sides of his coat, and then, leaping on to a sofa or some convenient chair, to stand there with his arms at right angles, crowing himself purple in the face.

All these things he had done many a time for the idle entertainment of fellow-members in the smoking-room of the Drones, but never with the gusto, the *brio*, with which he performed them now. Essentially a modest man, like all the Mulliners, he was compelled, nevertheless, to recognize that to-night he was surpassing himself. Every artist knows when the authentic divine fire is within him, and an inner voice told Archibald Mulliner that he was at the top of his form and giving the performance of a lifetime. Love thrilled through every "Brt-t't-t't" that he uttered, animated each flap of his arms. Indeed, so deeply did Love drive in its spur that he tells me that, instead of the customary once, he actually made the circle of the room three times before coming to roost on top of the chest of drawers.

When at length he did so he glanced towards the window and saw that through the curtains the loveliest face in the world was peering. And in Aurelia Cammarleigh's glorious eyes there was a look he had never seen before, the sort of look Kreisler or somebody like that beholds in the eyes of the front row as he lowers his violin and brushes his forehead with the back of his hand. A look of worship.

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There was a long silence. Then she spoke.

'Do it again!" she said.

And Archibald did it again. He did it four times, and could, he tells me, if he had pleased, have taken a fifth encore, or at any rate a couple of bows. And then, leaping lightly to the floor, he advanced towards her. He felt conquering, dominant. It was his hour. He reached out and clasped her in his arms.

"Aurelia, old girl," said Archibald Mulliner in a clear, firm voice, "you are the bee's roller-skates."

And at that she seemed to melt into his embrace. Her lovely face was raised to his.

'Archibald!" she whispered.

There was another throbbing silence, broken only by the beating of two hearts and the wheezing of the bulldog, who seemed to suffer a good deal in his bronchial tubes. Then Archibald released her.

"Well, that's that," he said. "Glad everything's all settled and hotsy-totsy. Gosh, I wish I had a cigarette. This is the sort of moment a bloke needs one."

"Archie Mulliner?"
"Yes. The betting at the Junior Lipstick is seven to two that you'll marry him."

She looked at him surprised.

"But I thought you didn't smoke?

'Oh, yes, I do."

'And do you drink as well?"

'Quite as well," said Archibald. "In fact,

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Archibald edged a step closer to the curtains

rather better. Oh, by the way."

"Yes?"

"There's just one other thing. Suppose that aunt of yours wants to come and visit us when we are settled down in our little nest, what, dearest, would be your reaction to the scheme of soaking her on the base of the skull with a stuffed eelskin?"

"I should like it," said Aurelia, warmly, "above all things."

"Twin souls," cried Archibald. "That's what we are, when you come right down to it. I suspected it all along, and now I know. Two jolly old twin souls." He embraced her ardently. "And now," he said, "let us pop downstairs and put this bulldog in the butler's pantry, where he will come upon him unexpectedly in the morning and doubtless get a shock which will do him as much good as a week at the seaside. Are you on?"

"I am," whispered Aurelia. "Oh, I am!"

And hand in hand they wandered out together on to the broad staircase.

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The Storm

By

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

Illustrated by
H. COLLER

THE Blundells' bungalow always gave one deliciously a breath of home. Mrs. Armstrong had made the remark to her husband, the Police Commissioner for this up-country district, as in the short African twilight their "flivver" had bumped and rattled on the rough track up through the plantation to the house. She made it again now to Mrs. Blundell herself, as the ladies embraced affectionately at the veranda-doorway. Moreover, Mrs. Blundell herself was charming. Mrs. Armstrong had uttered this opinion also on the way up. Her husband had enthusiastically endorsed it, despite his concentrated struggle with the bucking "flivver," had jerked out that these three years of marriage had made a new man of Jack Blundell. Best day's work J. B. ever did, Major Armstrong had commented. He was inclined to repeat that comment now as he smiled and shook hands with his hostess. Fair-haired and blue-eyed, something a little over thirty in the matter of age, neatly and tastefully dressed, she appeared distinctly pretty this evening.

"Always as fresh as paint, dear lady!" he said. "You must have some very special secret recipe! Perhaps it's a good conscience?"

She smiled at him, her soft blue eyes lighting up.

"Perhaps it is, Major. Or perhaps just happiness."

"Maybe that," he agreed. "May you long be happy, lady, as you deserve!"

She smiled at him again.

"Jack will be out in a moment," she said. "He's just getting rid of the dust. I told the boy to serve the cocktails out here under the veranda."

"Splendid!" said Major Armstrong as he stripped off his long dust-coat, and revealed the dinner-jacket that was integral in the social code even of this sparsely-inhabited section of the colony peopled, as they were proud to maintain, "by sahibs, thank God!" "I'm afraid there's a pretty bad storm brewing, though," he added. "We could see it collecting over the hills as we came along. Let's hope it gives us a miss. Helen can't abide storms."

Mrs. Armstrong smiled up from the cane-chair where Mrs. Blundell had placed her.

"I can't abide these African storms," she said. "They scare me. It's the one thing in the country I can't get used to. And to-night I think it's dreadfully oppressive. You know that awful feeling that something is going to happen?"

"All that's going to happen to-night, old lady," Major Armstrong laughed, "is a jolly good dinner. That's if I know anything of Mrs. Blundell's hospitality. Hallo, here's J. B.!"

Jack Blundell at that moment emerged from the doorway on to the veranda—a big burly fellow, somewhat of a rough diamond for all his public school and University.

"Hallo, Armstrong! Mrs. Armstrong—delighted to see you! Jolly good of you to make these twenty miles to come to us!"

"Even risking a first-class article in the way of storms!" laughed Major Armstrong, "—or I'm a Dutchman. I don't want to catch it on the road back—it's not too good in a wash-out."

"I know. Particularly at the bridge. If we do get anything of a storm, you're here for the night, my friends."

The negro boy appeared with a salver of cocktails.

"I must say you perform in style," commented Armstrong, as he took one. "Silver salvers and all! A little different from the old rough-and-tumble days, J. B., what?"

Blundell smiled.

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"That's Ruth," he said. "She doesn't believe in living like pigs, and she's right, by the Lord. I'm a new man since I married, Armstrong. It could hardly be otherwise with my particular brand of wife." He put his arm affectionately round his wife's waist as he spoke. "She'd make a docile angel out of a devil! Wouldn't you, sweetheart?"

She laughed softly and happily.

"Hardly, Jack. But then you weren't a devil—you were just a big, blundering, honest schoolboy, as you still are. And I never want you to grow up."

Blundell lifted his glass.

"Well, here's love to everybody! Not a little sip, sweetheart? No? I shall really have to find some hidden vice in you some day—this can't go on! You're too good to be true. I wake up in the night, sometimes, trying to think of some secret crime you must have committed!"

"Nonsense, Jack!" his wife laughed to him. "Drink up your cocktail and don't say silly things!"

The two men sat side by side looking out into the now complete blackness.

"Busy, Armstrong?" asked Blundell. "Anything exciting on hand?"

"No," replied the Police Commissioner. "Nothing doing lately. Everyone's paid his hut-tax like a lamb. No nigger has run off with any other nigger's wife. No nigger has been making *ju-ju*, or doing anything else that's naughty. I haven't had a crime for a month. It's almost uncanny. But I'll bet something's on the road. Something really juicy to make up for it."

THEY were in the drawing-room. The storm had been raging for more than two hours. The vehement roar of the torrentially released rain was a constant background for deafening splitting crashes that seemed each like the world in collapse. Unpleasantly visible even in this lamp-illumined room through the interstices of the shutters, the lightning was incessant in a diabolic blue vividness. Conversation was impossible. The two ladies—Mrs. Armstrong very white—sat with needlework in their hands; Mrs. Blundell smilingly exhibiting her own, doing her best to divert her friend's attention from that terrifying violence of elements in tropical discharge. The two men sat and smoked their pipes, bawled a remark every now and then.

"You won't get home to-night, my lad!" Blundell had to shout. "I'll bet that bridge has gone!"

"Sorry, J. B.!" Armstrong smiled back at him. "I'm really afraid you're right. I shouldn't like to trust that road. Too bad, though, to put you to that bother!"

"Don't apologize!" Blundell reassured him heartily. "It's no trouble. We've all the domestic conveniences nowadays—haven't we, sweetheart?" He exerted his voice yet more to make it heard across the room, gave his wife that smile of fond pride that was ever ready when he looked at her.

Mrs. Blundell smiled back to him.

"I was just telling Mrs. Armstrong that they mustn't think of going," she said. "They can have the spare room."

At that moment the native boy appeared.

"Boss!" he said.

"What is it?" Blundell beckoned him.

The negro bent down to him, spoke rapidly.

The planter jumped up.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Excuse me for a moment, people. There's some poor devil in a car got caught in the storm and thoroughly swamped. He's found his way here. I must go and see to him."

THE storm now slackened more and more at every moment. Conversation became possible in the drawing-room and the three of them speculated as to the identity of the unfortunate traveller while Blundell's absence prolonged itself tantalizingly.

"You will curse this storm—turning your bungalow into a free hotel, Mrs. Blundell!" said Major Armstrong.

"I'm grateful to it," she replied. "It keeps you longer with us! But, if you will excuse me leaving you alone together for a moment, I really must go and tell those boys to make up a spare bed in Jack's office. Perhaps the poor man ought to be put to bed at once. Will you do your best to amuse yourselves for a minute or two?"

She went out.

"Damned good little woman, that!" remarked Armstrong. "Nothing puts her out. Always ready to do a kind action."

"She's the sweetest thing!" commented Mrs. Armstrong, energetically. "And she's found just the right husband for her—or, at any rate, J. B. has found the right wife. He adores her!"

"She adores him, too." Armstrong was emphatic. "Not much doubt of that. It does one good to see 'em. They're still at boy and girl romance, those two."

"Let's hope it lasts," said Mrs. Armstrong. "It's the best thing in the world."

"Let's hope so," he answered. "Thank God, this beastly storm seems to have decided to give over."

At that moment Blundell came into the room with his stray visitor—a dark-featured, hugely-built, bull-necked man, bigger even than himself.

"Let me introduce you," he said. "This is Mr. Manwaring. Mrs. Armstrong—Major

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Armstrong, Commissioner of Police in these parts."

"I've just been thanking Mr. Blundell for his kindness," the new-comer said. His tone, to their selective ears, was not quite that of a "sahib." He smiled under his black moustache. "I'm a stranger out here. I was on my way to stay with a friend of mine. He sent his car to meet me at rail-head this morning, and everything possible went wrong with the beastly thing. Finally we got caught in the storm and we were absolutely swamped. The nigger who drove the car said the road would be washed away farther on, and the only thing to do was to make for Mr. Blundell's bungalow. I don't mind telling you I was never more pleased in my life to get under a roof!"

"All's well that ends well," smiled Blundell. "Lucky your kit-bag kept a dry change for you." He glanced at his visitor's bulky form. "My clothes wouldn't have fitted you. Now, I guess, a drink?"

His guest accepted a whisky-and-soda gratefully, stood glass in hand in the middle of the room.

"Here's how!" said Blundell, raising his own glass. "By the way"—he turned to the Armstrongs—"what's happened to the missus?"

"She went to prepare a bed for your visitor," said Mrs. Armstrong. "Here she comes."

"Let me introduce you to my wife," Blundell said to his guest, in his voice that naively fond pride with which he always brought her forward.

THE man turned round, stood staring. The glass of whisky dropped from his hand in a crash.

Mrs. Blundell also stood staring, strangely white.

There was a peculiar silence. Blundell glanced in bewildered astonishment from one to the other. The stranger turned abruptly to Major Armstrong.

"I think I understood you are the Commissioner of Police, Major? I invite you to arrest this woman!"

Blundell leaped forward.

"What the devil do you mean——?" he began.

Mr. Manwaring stopped him with a gesture, continued to address the Commissioner of Police.

"There is a Scotland Yard warrant out against her in her correct name of Mrs. Ruth Manwaring. She is my wife."

The woman gasped, seemed as though about to faint. Blundell sprang and caught her in his arms.

"Ruth! Ruth, darling! Is this man mad?"

She only stared at the intruder as though he were a ghost.

"I am not in the least mad, Mr. Blundell," said the stranger. "I very much regret having to give you this shock. But I have been looking for this woman for five years." He switched again to Major Armstrong, who had now risen to his full gaunt height. "I can give you a police handbill with her description." He took a wallet from his breast-pocket, extracted a folded piece of time-discoloured paper, and passed it to the Commissioner of Police. Major Armstrong glanced at it and frowned. "You see the charge? Robbery. You can now apparently add bigamy."

Major Armstrong looked at him.

"But, my dear sir——" he began.

The man interrupted harshly.

"Unless you propose to shirk your plain duty, Major, you have no alternative. I lay definite information before you as the Commissioner of Police that this woman is wanted on a warrant she has evaded for five years. Ignore it at your peril. You will be responsible if she escapes—or makes away with herself. I request you as an officer of the law instantly to take this woman into custody."

"You damned liar!" Blundell said, with his arms around her. "Get out of my house!"

"Steady, J. B.," Major Armstrong interposed. "I'm afraid this has become my province." He turned to Manwaring. "Very good. As you say, I must accept your charge." He addressed the half-fainting woman. "Mrs. Blundell—or Mrs. Manwaring, if that is your correct name—I hate to have to say this to you—but you must consider yourself formally under arrest." Again he swung round to the accuser. "But understand this, Mr. Manwaring—I don't admire your manners, sir!"

The man laughed—an ugly laugh.

"Manners be damned!" he said. "I've caught her!"

"Oh, my dear!" gasped Mrs. Armstrong from her chair. "This is awful! Jim! I'm sure she's innocent! I'm sure——!"

Blundell was gently depositing his wife upon the floor. She had fainted. He muttered to himself something about killing this swine directly he got a moment.

Major Armstrong glanced at him. J. B. could be dangerous. There was trouble enough, without an addition of violence. The rain was still coming down in torrents, though now no longer in so deafening a roar; plainly this unwelcome guest could not be turned out, perhaps to be drowned in this black night of storm. He frowned. It was a most unpleasant business.

Blundell bent over his wife.

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" Ruth ! Ruth, sweetheart ! Thank God, you've come round ! Ruth !—tell me this man's lying ! "

" It's true, Jack."

He stared at her, stricken speechless ; rose to his feet in horror.

Manwaring laughed brutally.

" Of course it's true ! She bolted with another man and took with her all she could lay hands on ! But I've run her to earth, as I swore I would—though it's only a lucky chance ! "

Major Armstrong shot a brief glance of dislike at him and fingered his lean jaw.

" Mrs.—er—Manwaring," he said, in a kind tone. " When you feel better, I should like to ask you a few questions. You need not answer them unless you wish, of course."

" I feel better now, Major," she answered. " I will answer anything you ask me." She struggled to her feet. " I'm quite ready."

The Commissioner of Police turned to Blundell.

" Can you provide me with a table and a sheet or two of paper, J. B. ? " he asked. " I think I had better do this in proper form."

" I'll have nothing to do with it ! " Blundell ejaculated. " I don't understand any of this—but I'm sure this fellow's a wrong 'un, and before I've finished with him he's going to pay for coming in here like this and—and smashing things up ! "

" My dear fellow," Armstrong said, affectionately. " Don't make things worse. For your sake, for everybody's sake, it will be just as well to hear at once the story of this lady you believed to be your wife. It is a kindness to her."

" Look here ! " interjected Manwaring. " You don't propose to turn this room into a court of law, do you ? All you have to do is to send her down the line under arrest and put her on the next boat for England ! She can tell her story at the Old Bailey."

" My good sir," Major Armstrong said, curtly. " You appealed to my authority as Commissioner of Police. I propose now to exercise it. I can appoint any premises I wish to the purposes of the law. Pray be silent ! "

THE Commissioner of Police glanced around the room.

" That little table will do," he said, " if you will allow me to use it, Blundell. Now a sheet or two of paper," he added.

" You will find plenty in the drawer of the table, Major," said Mrs. Manwaring.

He extracted some, arranged it in front of him, took a pen from his pocket, smiled at her.

" I think, Mrs. Manwaring, you would be more composed and comfortable if you took a chair."

She obeyed with docility.

He referred to the police handbill in front of him.

" Mrs. Manwaring," he glanced at her features as though in comparison with the printed details, " your description has been circulated on the charge that on the night of the 15th December, 1921, you, in company with a certain Evan Thompson, also wanted on the charge, did forcibly open a piece of furniture, the property of your husband, Henry Manwaring, abstract from it currency to the value of eighty-five pounds, and abscond therewith. Do you answer to that charge ? "

" I do." She replied in quiet distress, avoiding even a glance at Blundell, who stood in an evident agony.

Major Armstrong rapidly wrote a few words.

" Now, Mrs. Manwaring, it is my duty to warn you, clearly and solemnly, that any statement you may make may be given in evidence. You have a perfect right to refuse to answer any question that I may ask you. You have a perfect right to say nothing at all, if you prefer."

" I would prefer to make a statement."

" Very good. I will take it down in your own words and afterwards you can sign it if you find it correct. What do you wish to say ? "

Her pale face was pathetic.

" It is quite true. On the night you say—on the 15th December, 1921—I ran away from my husband's house with my cousin, Evan Thompson. I had no money, and I broke open my husband's desk, where I knew he kept some, and took all there was. My husband was away from home."

" It is my duty to ask you this question, Mrs. Manwaring, but you need not answer it unless you wish. Where is your accomplice —this Evan Thompson—now ? "

A spasm passed over her face.

" He is dead," she said. " He was run over and killed that night—after he had put me into a hotel."

" Were you not aware, Mrs. Manwaring, that legally it was robbery to take your husband's money and go away with it, as you admit doing ? "

" I thought I was entitled to it," she replied, a little faintly. " It was really my own."

" Your own ? " Major Armstrong was plainly surprised. " Would you like to explain why you considered it your own ? "

" When I married I had a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. I made it over to my husband."

" It was *my* money she took ! She can't get away from that ! " interjected Manwaring. " Legally mine ! "

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The Commissioner of Police ignored him.

"How old were you, Mrs. Manwaring, when you married?"

"Twenty-one."

"And you made over all your property to your husband?"

"Yes. He persuaded me to sign a document—it was very complicated—I did not understand it—I thought it was merely to help him in his business affairs at the moment—it was not until afterwards that I discovered what I had done."

"And you had no friends—no parents—to advise you?"

"I was an orphan. My mother died when I was a child. My father died just before I married. I had no friends. My father was an invalid and I looked after him. Nobody but—my husband," she boggled a little over the word, "ever came to the house. I think he had some hold over my father."

"H'm!" Major Armstrong looked grim. "So you thought you were entitled to money that was really your own?"

"Yes. My husband had none at all. I found out afterwards that he was a recently discharged bankrupt when I married him."

"I should like to say——!" Manwaring began.

The Commissioner of Police held up his hand for silence.

"AND why did you wish to leave your husband?"

"I could not stand his treatment any longer."

"What treatment did you complain of?"

"He beat me unmercifully and kept me a prisoner in the house while he boasted of spending my money on other women."

"The brute!" muttered Blundell. "I'll have a few words with him presently!"

"Look here!" Manwaring exclaimed. "I protest against all this nonsense. It's not my character you're supposed to be investigating! All you have to do, Mr. Policeman, is to hand this woman over to the home authorities to stand her trial! That's all that anyone wants from you!"

The Commissioner of Police turned upon him. In voice and aspect he was suddenly formidable.

"Please be silent, Mr. Manwaring. I am interrogating an accused person. Interrupt again, and I take you into custody for disturbing the processes of the law!"

"My hands are itching to get at him!" muttered Blundell again. "The scoundrel!"

"Please be silent also, Mr. Blundell! I am conducting a preliminary inquiry in the interests of the prisoner. It may be to her advantage that her statement should be taken. Now, Mrs. Manwaring—for how long did you have to complain of this treatment?"

"For the whole time of my marriage."

"And you could not leave him and take refuge with friends?"

"I did not know where to go. He never allowed anyone to come to the house. And I had no money. He paid all the housekeeping bills himself."

"Indeed!" Major Armstrong's voice was sympathetic. "And who was this Evan Thompson?"

"My cousin. He was only a boy, and I hadn't seen him since he was a child. He came back from abroad, and traced me. My husband was away when he called. He—he found me with bruises on my face, and I told him everything. He said he would find a safe, quiet place for me while he consulted a lawyer about getting me a divorce. I was in terror of my husband, and agreed. He had only a very little money—as I told you, he was only a boy—and so I went to my husband's desk, broke it open, and took what I could find. We went to London together, and he found a respectable small hotel for me——" She swallowed. "I have told you what happened to him. They did not identify him—but I recognized the description in the papers. I was too terrified of my husband's finding me to say anything to anybody."

"Quite. I understand." Major Armstrong's tone was gently compassionate. "And then what happened?"

"I changed my name and got a job as a waitress in a tea-shop. I was there for more than a year. One day Jack came in. I served him and he spoke to me. He came again, often. He told me he was home on leave from East Africa and asked me to marry him. It seemed deliverance, and—and," she checked, painfully, "I could not help loving him. I said I was a widow. We were married at a Register Office. We came out here, and I thought, I prayed, that I should never see or hear of my first husband any more."

"And that is all your statement, Mrs. Manwaring?"

"That is all."

"My poor darling!" exclaimed Blundell. He almost ran across to her, put his arms round her, kissed her fondly. "And you shall never get into that scoundrel's hands again, if I know it!"

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Armstrong, fervently. She smiled gratefully to her husband. "And now, Jim, now that we know exactly what happened, you can tell her that there's nothing to worry about—that she can't be arrested on this monstrous charge!"

Major Armstrong frowned.

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" Unfortunately, that is just what I can't do," he said. " Mrs. Manwaring is technically liable to the charge of robbery. A warrant is in existence against her. It has been brought to my notice as a police officer. I have no option but to take her into custody and hand her over to the authorities to stand her trial. And I fear the charge of bigamy must be added to the charge against her."

" Jim ! " Mrs. Armstrong was horrified.

" Look here, Armstrong ! " exclaimed Blundell. " This is fantastic nonsense ! Do you mean to tell me this scoundrel has the right to come here and smash up our home, to send his wretched victim into the dock to be disgraced by a public trial ? "

" Unfortunately, I do mean it," replied Armstrong. " There is no alternative. I must send her down the railway to-morrow."

" You have quite completed your official investigations ? "

" So far as Mrs. Manwaring is concerned—yes."

Blundell stripped off his dinner-jacket.

" Then, Mr. Manwaring, I am now going to give you the hiding of your life ! "

The big man shrank back.

" Major Armstrong ! " he exclaimed. " I put myself under police protection ! "

" All right," said Blundell. " I'll answer to the charge of assault and battery ! They can send Ruth and me down the line together ! "

With the last word his fist shot out, straight to the man's jaw. Manwaring went down like a log, striking his head against the grand piano as he fell.

" Get up, you brute ! " Blundell stood over him, grimly savage, his fists clenched. " Get up and take your punishment ! Or I'll smash you where you lie ! "

But the man did not move. He lay very still, without a twitch.

" Get up, I say ! " Blundell vociferated over him. "Get up—or I'll get a sjambok to you ! "

Armstrong pushed him aside sharply, knelt down to the bulky outstretched figure, felt over it with expert hands. He looked up with a white and startled face.

" He's dead ! "

Blundell stared down at the body as if dazed.

" Good God ! "

ARMSTRONG rose to his feet.

" This is a bad business, J. B. People can't commit murders in my presence with impunity. You know what it means ? "

" *Murder ?* " Blundell gasped at him.

" That must be the charge. Your counsel may plead manslaughter. I can't help myself. J. B., I'm sorry, desperately sorry ! "

" All right," said Blundell, thickly. " I won't give any trouble. Try to let Ruth and me travel back together, that's all."

She had run forward, flung her arms about him, burst into sobs against him.

" Jack ! Jack ! Oh, this is too terrible ! It was for me you did it—for me. I've brought all this trouble on you—Jack ! Jack, darling ! "

" All right, old girl. That brute only got what he deserved. And you don't know how much I love you ! "

" And I you—I you, dearest ! " There was agony in her voice.

Blundell turned to his friend.

" What are you going to do with us now, Armstrong ? We're both under arrest, I suppose ? But I'm afraid I didn't allow for any police cells when I built this bungalow. Can you take our word for it that we won't bolt during the night ? "

" I would take your word for anything, J. B.—but I can't. It's my duty to keep you under constant supervision. The only way is for us to sit here till the morning—and then I'll send for my assistant." He turned to his wife. " Helen, dear, you go off to bed."

" No, indeed I won't," she replied, with emphasis. " I'm going to stay here with Ruth. Isn't there *any* way out of this dreadful business ? "

He shrugged his shoulders, despairfully.

" Don't talk about it, Mrs. Armstrong," said Blundell. " Your husband has got to do his job."

Mrs. Manwaring spoke, her face tense and drawn.

" Jack—it drives me almost mad to think I caused this ! Can you ever forgive me ? My dear ! My dear ! "

He put his arm round her.

" You didn't cause it, sweetheart—it was that brute there who caused all the trouble—and if you want my opinion, he's distinctly better dead. By the way, Armstrong, what are we going to do with the gentleman ? Must we sit here and watch him all night ? "

" Strictly speaking, he ought to lie there untouched until a doctor has had a look at him," replied the Commissioner of Police. " But I don't feel like sending for Fenwick on a night like this. We don't want another tragedy of people getting drowned. He'll have to wait till morning—and I think that's asking a little too much of us. We don't want the servants in. Do you think you could help me to carry him into a bedroom ? "

" With the best will in the world ! Come along ! " Blundell went towards the corpse, Armstrong following him. " Incidentally, old man, isn't part of your job to go through the pockets of this scoundrel ? "

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"I suppose it is," said Armstrong. "Let's have a look." He knelt down and put his hand into the dead man's breast-pocket, took out the wallet. "It's my job, anyway, to assure myself of his identity." He extracted a wad of papers, commenced to glance through them. "Driving licence—name of Henry Manwaring — money — letters ——" He scrutinized an envelope, drew out its contents. "Letter from a woman—here—what's this? Good Lord!" He frowned at the letter in his hand. "Listen a moment, Mrs. Manwaring, and see if you can throw any light on this — it's addressed from Paris, six months ago, and forwarded through a succession of banks to Henry Manwaring, care of the bank at Mombasa — it's in French—but I'll translate for everyone's benefit: 'My dear husband, —You were no doubt hoping that I was dead in the prison into which you tricked me for a life sentence fourteen years ago. As you see, I am not merely alive, but have been set at liberty. I do not know where you are living — I have no doubt you have always managed to save your skin —but I am sending this to your bank. I do not expect generosity from you, nor gratitude for my silence. Nor do I desire ever to see you again. But I expect, and intend to have, money from you sufficient to maintain me during the remainder of the life you ruined. I am your wife by English law, since you married me in London. Therefore, in your own interest, you will do well to send me a remittance at once to the above address. Otherwise, I shall know how to make myself unpleasant.' It is signed 'Elise.'" The Commissioner of Police scrutinized the envelope. "Evidently, he received this two days ago—perhaps had not yet made up his mind what to answer." He looked across to Mrs. Manwaring. "In what year did you marry him?"

She stared, a little bewildered.

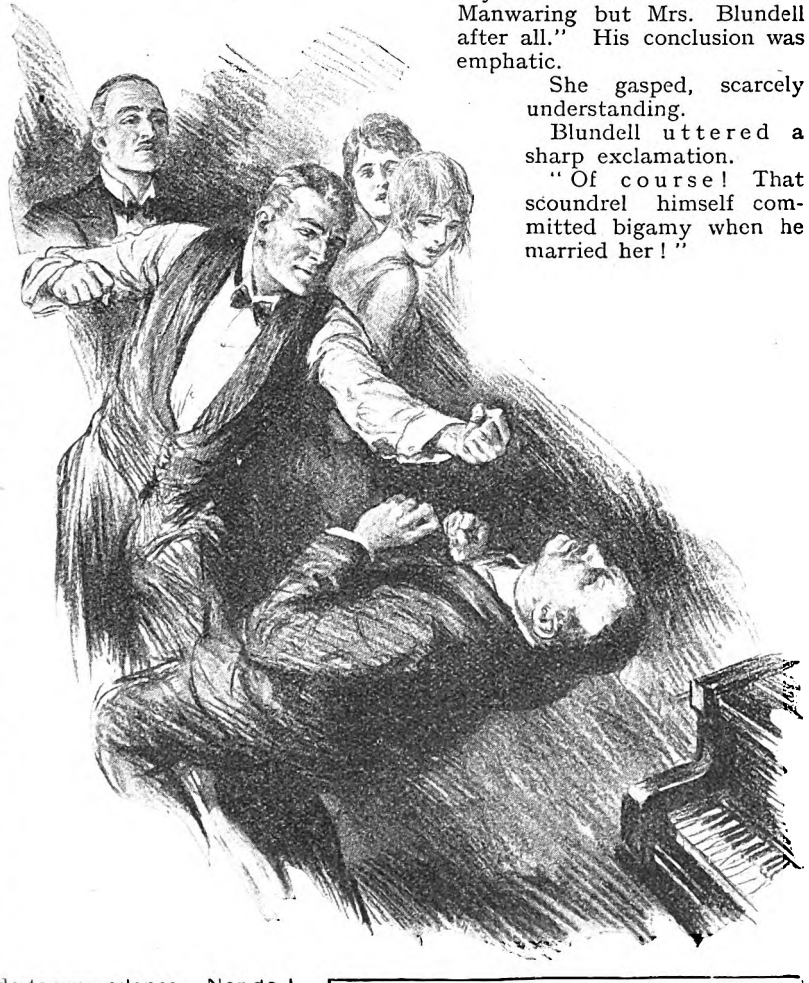
"In 1915," she answered. "June, 1915."

"That is somewhat less than fourteen years ago," remarked Armstrong. "Assuming that this letter may be accepted as evidence—and I propose to accept it as such —your correct name is not Mrs. Manwaring but Mrs. Blundell after all." His conclusion was emphatic.

She gasped, scarcely understanding.

Blundell uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Of course! That scoundrel himself committed bigamy when he married her!"



Manwaring went down like a log, striking his head against the grand piano as he fell.

"Precisely. It would need to be proved, of course, but I have no doubt it can be proved. The letter from this wretched

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woman—whoever she is, and whatever her crime was—rings true enough. For present purposes I am going to assume that it *is* true. The warrant made out against Mrs. Manwaring cannot apply to Mrs. Blundell. It is technically—as well as morally—void. It shall be void." He rose, went across to the little table, tore up into small fragments the police handbill and what he had written of the statement made to him.

"You mean—that I shall not have to—to go to prison?" she faltered.

"You will not even have to be tried, Mrs. Blundell. The matter no longer exists. But if this man were still alive, you could certainly put *him* on his trial—on more charges than one." He frowned, puzzled. "What beats me is that, knowing the danger of his own position, he should have dared to insist to-night on your arrest. I can't think what he thought he was going to get out of it. He was, at the least, running a big risk—although no doubt he was confident of being able to keep this French woman quiet."

Blundell spoke with his arm around his wife's waist.

"Some deep villainy, I'll be bound. The brute!"

"Probably." Armstrong shrugged his shoulders. "However, let us continue our investigation." He went back to the corpse, continued his search through the other miscellaneous papers a man keeps in his pocket-book, checked at a newspaper cutting. "What's this?" He frowned at it. "Did you ever know anyone of the name of Whitty, Mrs. Blundell?"

She nodded.

"Yes. It was my mother's name. She had an only brother—Isaac—who went to Australia. I don't know what happened to him."

"This undated newspaper cutting says that a wealthy sheep-rancher by the name of Isaac Whitty has died and left a quarter of a million with no known heirs in Australia. Did this man know of your uncle's existence?"

"Yes—yes—I think so—I think I told him when we were first married. My father might have told him also."

Major Armstrong pursed his lips, narrowed his shrewd eyes.

"I think I begin to see a little daylight. If he could have salted you safely away in prison, he would then have put forward the probably very comprehensive document you signed, and claimed the administration of your estate. A deep rascal, if ever there was one! However, if—as I think more than likely—you are heiress to a quarter of a million, Mrs. Blundell, this man will not again deprive you of a fortune."

She clasped her hands.

"But Jack?—I don't care anything about the money—what is going to happen with Jack?"

Major Armstrong shrugged his shoulders. He sighed.

"There, I am afraid, I am quite helpless. Even if Mr. Manwaring was the worst of scoundrels—as evidently he was—it does not give your husband a licence to kill him."

"Oh, Major—for God's sake, think of some way to save him! There must be a way—*some* way—I am sure there must!"

"I wish I could see it, dear lady. I wish with all my heart my job was different."

"Don't mention it, old chap," said Blundell. "I don't throw any bricks at you for it. In your boots, I'd behave the same. See if this fellow has anything else interesting on him."

THE Police Commissioner continued his search through the dead man's pockets.

"No," he said. "Nothing. Nothing of any interest. The usual odds and ends." He made a pile of them upon the floor: a bunch of keys, a handful of loose change, cigarettes, a couple of pipes, tobacco. He unfastened his gold watch-chain, took out a gold hunter-watch from the vest-pocket, automatically snapped open the case, glanced inside. He looked up with a jerk, his expression curiously altered.

"Mrs. Blundell," he said, "you were married, or thought you were married, to this man in 1915. What did he do in the War?"

"He was in a Government office—in the Ministry of Shipping."

"Good God!" Major Armstrong's face had gone deathly white.

"What's the matter?" asked Blundell.

"This!" He held up the gold watch. On the inside of the open case was an engraved cabalistic device with a number underneath. "I was in the Intelligence branch myself during the War. This is one of the watches issued by the German secret service department to its agents. If a man wished to assure himself that another was also a fellow-agent, he would go up to him, ask him the time, and snap open his watch as if to check it. A glance at the other fellow's watch—and he had made the contact, or otherwise. It was a kind of badge, issued only to the first-rate regular men, entitling the bearer to all possible assistance from every other agent."

"Phew!" said Blundell. "That was his little job then—and that's how, just before the War, he *tricked* Madame Elise into a life-sentence in a French prison—worked a 'frame-up' on her, I suppose, in the

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orthodox way, when she was of no more use. A pretty specimen of scum, what ? "

" Scum ! " exclaimed Armstrong. " The man's a murderer many times over ! Think ! He was in the Ministry of Shipping—how many ships did he help to send to the bottom ?—the ships of whose sailings, as I happen to know, the enemy submarines had such uncanny knowledge ! My God, J. B.—if you hadn't killed him, I'd have throttled him myself ! My only brother went down on one of those ships."

" If I hadn't accidentally killed him, you wouldn't have known, my dear chap. You would have most dutifully helped him to send my wife to jail."

" That's true. Damnably true. But this alters everything. I don't grumble at the enemy doing their job in war-time—but I do draw the line at traitors to their own country like this reptile. The man's an outlaw—morally, if not legally. And if I'd known what he was I'd have killed him on sight myself—or done my best to ! "

There was a silence in the room. They realized that the rain had ceased. The hush was eerie.

Mrs. Armstrong spoke.

" What are you going to do, Jim ? "

He was haggard as he stood tensely fingering his lean jaw.

" Do ? What can I do ? " he replied. " It's monstrous that J. B. should be arrested and tried for ridding the world of a scoundrel like this. But there it is."

" I meant only to give him a hiding, as you know," remarked Blundell, anxiety in his tone.

Mrs. Blundell gazed at the Commissioner of Police in a pathetic hopefulness.

" Major Armstrong," she said, " please—please think of some way——"

He looked at her desperately.

" I'm trying to. It's damnably difficult. I've never played with my duty in my life. I can't now. If there was only some little technicality—something that would justify me—something that would take it out of my hands—anything short of perjury ! Oh, my God ! " he groaned. " Blundell, I wish I'd hit him and not you ! What's the time ? "

" Just before midnight."

Armstrong put his hand over his eyes.

" I wonder whom he was going to visit ? " he muttered.

" I was going to ask him—but I never did," said Blundell.

" We'd better send for the car-driver. It would be something to know to whom we've got to explain matters. Must be someone round here."

At that moment the native boy appeared in the doorway, looked across to Blundell.

" Doctor come, Boss," he said, holding the door open.

" Fenwick, of all people ! " exclaimed Armstrong, as the doctor for the district came into the room. He was in mud-splashed riding-breeches, and had an electric torch in his hand.

" 'Evening, Armstrong—'Evening, ladies—'Evening, Blundell ! " he said, cheerfully. " I hear you've given refuge to my lost guest. I've been scouring the countryside for him for hours. I thought he must have been drowned in a wash-out—you've got a pretty bad one just below here. Well—where's my unfortunate traveller ? "

Armstrong gestured to the floor by the piano.

" Good Lord ! " ejaculated the doctor. " What's happened ? "

' Well, I'm not on oath," said Armstrong, grimly, " but Mr. Manwaring had a sort of stroke. I've just been going through his pockets."

The doctor knelt beside the prone figure.

" He's dead ! " he said. " Quite dead."

" Oh, yes," agreed Armstrong. " He's quite dead."

" Heart failure ! " remarked the doctor. " Written all over him. Dear, dear ! How did he get this mark on his jaw ? "

" I saw him hit himself against the piano as he fell," said Armstrong. The muscles of his face were prominent on his gaunt cheeks. The other three stood in breathless suspense.

" Very likely." The doctor nodded in acceptance of the suggestion.

Armstrong cleared his throat.

" Would a blow have had anything to do with his death ? "

" Hardly. Anything would do it with a man of this body—an emotional shock—nothing at all even—just a failure. He was bound to go suddenly."

" Have you any objection to giving a certificate, then ? " Armstrong's voice was enforced to normality. " It's bad enough for the Blundells to have this happen, as it is. I don't suppose they're craving to give evidence at an inquest."

" It's natural death all right. As I say, this man might have dropped dead at any minute these last ten years—almost ought to have been dead. I have no objection whatever to giving a certificate. It rests with you, Major. You're the highest police authority in this part of the world. If you will accept my word for it that he died a natural death——? "

" As the Commissioner of Police, I accept your professional word for it," said Arm-

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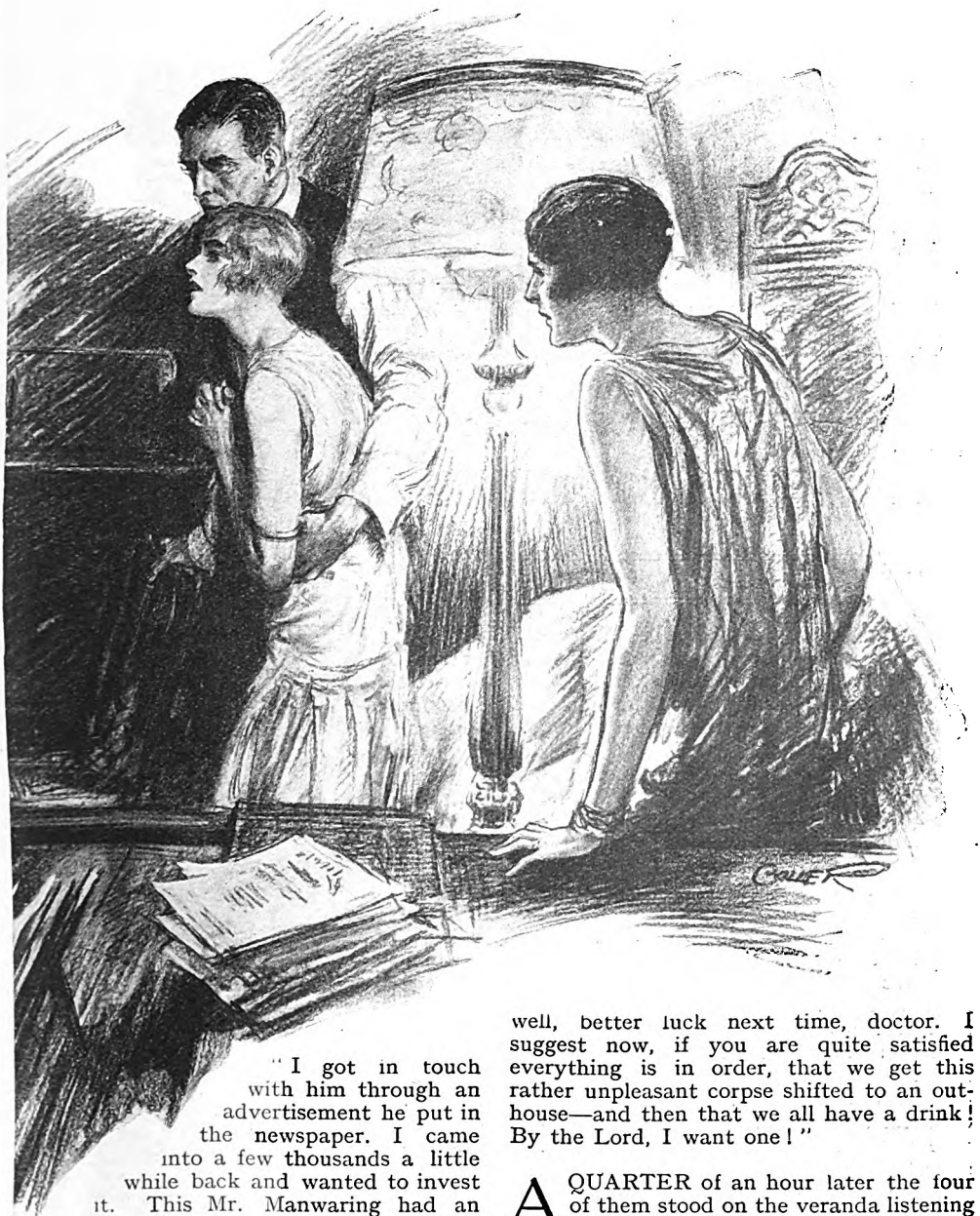

"I got in touch with him through an advertisement he put in the newspaper. I came into a few thousands a little while back and wanted to invest it. This Mr. Manwaring had an option on a just discovered gold-mine that needed capital for development. He was coming to explain the details personally to me — he wouldn't trust to writing them. Bad luck for me!" added the doctor, ruefully. "The whole thing was a dead secret—and now no one will ever know."

"Now no one will ever know," agreed Armstrong in a solemn voice. "Well, well, better luck next time, doctor. I suggest now, if you are quite satisfied everything is in order, that we get this rather unpleasant corpse shifted to an outhouse—and then that we all have a drink! By the Lord, I want one!"

A QUARTER of an hour later the four of them stood on the veranda listening to the departure of the doctor in his car. The night was now brilliantly clear and calm. An immense full moon floated in the sky. It was singularly peaceful.

Major Armstrong turned from his wife to Mrs. Blundell, arm-embraced with her husband.

"Well, dear lady," he said. "It was a pretty bad storm while it lasted. Thank God, it's all over—all serene again!"

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Great Men and their Clothes

BY THE EDITOR OF "The Tailor and Cutter"

THE PRINCE OF WALES.

IN the world of dress the Prince of Wales is a Laughing Cavalier among a set of stolid burghers. He is very human, and after he has been trussed up in stiff uniforms, naval and military, it is but natural that he should take holiday and enjoy himself. One can imagine the Prince, after several hours of a constricted tunic, Guards' greatcoat, and top-heavy busby, sighing for informality. Well may he tilt his hat jauntily, put on a butterfly bow, and depart from the old tradition by wearing gay trousers with a morning coat.

He loves brightness in his clothes, and has added to the gaiety of nations which followed his lead. He donned a Fair Isle sweater—and it ran through the world like a catchy jazz tune. After he took to a blue shirt his countrymen went back to woad, like the Ancient Britons. His fondness for check and plaid suitings has brought a distinctly Cubist note to golf-courses and the streets. Sometimes his golfing kit resembles a geometrical problem: "plus fours" of Glen Urquhart check, patterned hose, pull-over of diamond design, and a chequered cap—a harmony in blue and grey but a contrast in angles. For lounge suits he loves plain or herring-bone stripes.

When the occasion demands it the Prince is garbed with neatness and precision; yet there is usually a twinkle and sometimes the suspicion of a wink. He follows the preference of King Edward for a white waistcoat with a dinner jacket; and lightens the sombre elegance of evening dress with a shy flutter of cambric handkerchief and the favour of a flower.

With his fun and delightful streak of boyishness he dislikes the *rôle* of *arbiter elegantiarum;* and flouts it with a sense of humour. In holiday mood in Canada he clapped a broad-brimmed straw hat on his

"In the world of dress the Prince is a Laughing Cavalier."

Photo: Swaine.

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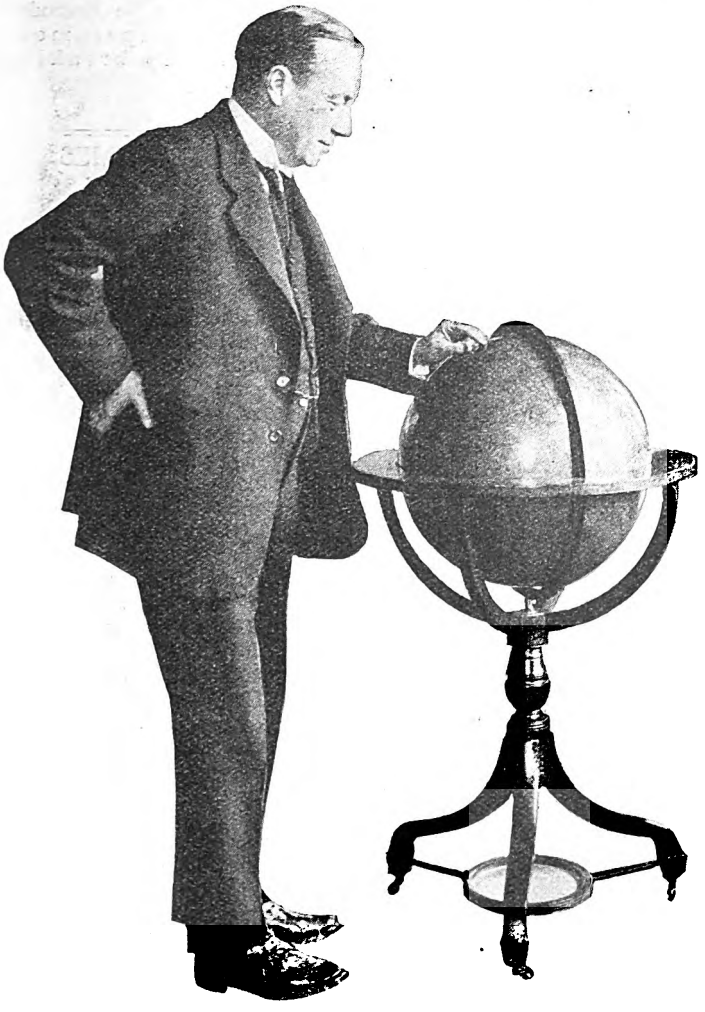
head, with a morning coat; pressed for time, he wore turned-up trousers with formal dress! In each case the cry went round: "The Prince sets a new fashion." The Prince can do no wrong—in dress.

MR. STANLEY BALDWIN.

MR. BALDWIN is the most disappointing Prime Minister, from the point of view of clothes, that Great Britain has ever had. He is not slovenly in a picturesque "beloved vagabond" style; nor does he scorn vesture in the lofty Cecilian manner. The tragedy is that the Premier misses the mark so badly after taking aim. To make a pretence of careful investment and then to realize so little is worse than a blunder: it is a crime. We do not ask that Mr. Baldwin should wear a morning coat with the dignity of Lord Birkenhead, nor a frock-coat with the majesty of the Foreign Secretary; but we expect him to compete with Mr. Lloyd George.

A man may be born with the faculty of dressing; he may achieve it, or it may be thrust upon him by feminine hands. But Mr. Baldwin's case is hopeless, for he has no clothes sense. Not for him the thrill of an attractive suit, the consciousness of cutting a figure, the satisfaction of being spruce. I have watched the Prime Minister in lounge suit, in morning coat and frock-coat; but he was never at home in them. Always he appeared an angular visitor who could not adapt himself to his environment. He not only fails in his suits, but is at cross-purposes with his hat and gloves.



"Mr. Baldwin's case is hopeless, for he has no clothes sense."

Photo: Central Press.

Yet there is an exception. Mr. Baldwin has often expressed the view that he could be happy in retirement in the country. It is when he assumes the *rôle* of Cincinnatus that he looks at ease sartorially. In rough tweeds, a battered hat, and with leather leggings and heavy boots, there is a successful coalition between wearer and kit. Had the Prime Minister lived in an earlier day I feel sure he would have appeared in *Punch* in a smock frock.

In his favourite dark lounge suit the jacket is always unbuttoned and in opposition, winging away from its wearer. He invariably adopts the Harrovian custom of leaving the bottom button of his waistcoat undone.

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Let the Premier take thought in time, for the flappers will judge by appearances and their votes may take flight to smarter regions.

MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL.

MR. CHURCHILL is such a versatile man that he could, if he set himself the task, achieve some sort of suavity in modish apparel. He could never become a dandy, because he has not the air nor the grace. Yet it would be wrong to fancy that the Chancellor thinks naught of raiment. If there is nothing of the coxcomb, there is also nothing of the clod-hopper in Winston.

The secret of Mr. Churchill's guise, the key to his mysterious style of dressing, is a love for the grotesque. Granted that he is not a beauty, there is no reason why he should not be clad neatly and simply. Yet he consciously chooses odd head-gear with a good-tempered grin. For a man of his age he is strangely fond of a frock-coat; in this and the bow he affects he is akin to Lord Balfour and his father. Probably he inherits a bizarre sartorial strain from Lord Randolph, who was the first man to wear a pair of brown boots in the House of Commons, and the only one ever to ally them with a frock-coat.

Mr. Churchill's preference for an astrakhan-trimmed overcoat is independent of fashion. He adopted it after it ceased to be the hall-mark of a successful actor and before it was adopted by smart men for wear over evening dress. With a liking for odd contrasts he wears this coat over hunting clothes, which is not fashion, but freakishness.

I have seen a photograph of Winston in homely garb, lounge suit, soft collar, badly knotted foulard tie, and unexpectedly elegant cloth-topped boots. The left side of the coat has an ungainly bulge, due to the heavy tax the Chancellor places on his own pockets. The flap of his pocket is irrepressible—alive, assertive, and impatient of authority.

Statesmen are often thought to make a shy advance to the caricaturist; Mr. Churchill meets him half way. His liking for caricature is shown in his adoption of a garment which in itself partakes of that quality—jodhpurs. Whatever sartorial fancies he may have in the future, he will never be orthodox—for temperament will keep breaking through!

"Mr. Churchill could never become a dandy."

"Graphic Photo Union."

SIR JAMES BARRIE.

SIR JAMES BARRIE cannot be said to be indifferent to dress, for there is a deliberate choice. A man who did not care a rap about food would eat what was set before him; he would not insist on the same dish day in and day out.

Barrie is gloom personified in his customary suits, and his overcoat is but an inky cloak. His spirit is clothed in fancy: his body in sackcloth and ashes. Had he but grasped the truth that gay trappings induce cheerfulness, how different would have been his lot! Colour and light would have transformed him into Sunny Jim: his depressing garb proclaims him Dismal James.

Genius is capable of miracles; and Sir James Barrie has kept alive under his pall a sweet wistfulness, a glow of romance, and a powerful

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"Barrie is gloom personified in his customary suits, and his overcoat is but an inky cloak."

Photo: "Topical."

imagination. Yet the tears are never far away.

He has never been "valiant in velvet," nor shown a gleam of the picturesque in his make-up. We look in vain for the flutter of a handkerchief, the note of brightness in a tie, or the glint of jewellery. Stevenson wrote romances in his appearance. Barrie pens tragedies. In the former you could see a hint of many of his characters; Sir James is nothing but the little minister in rusty black.

Where is the "Maconachie" side of Barrie? It is never hinted at in his outer manifestation. Does he reserve it for flamboyant pyjamas and gorgeous dressing-gowns? Or is it naught but a fiction? Alas! we are doomed always to look for glamour and find nothing but illusion.

Sir James's tie is never straight: it has some of his whimsical liking for wandering. It is a "Tinkabell" of a tie, and seems anxious to whisper some engaging thoughts into Barrie's left ear; it should be worn with a Peter Pan collar.

A picture comes to my mind of the creator of Wendy at Kirriemuir, among a group of Dundee students. They were clad in Scotch tweeds, college gowns, and brightly-hued scarves. Sir James stands among them—a tiny figure—as sombre as a Scottish Elder; and a living example of the way Nature wraps some of her choicest gifts in small parcels.

MR. BERNARD SHAW.

MR. BERNARD SHAW is an individualist in dress. Not for him the primrose path of conformity. His clothes philosophy is part of his philosophy of life; it is homespun. He is against tyranny of all kinds—including the tyranny of fashion. While the majority of folk tacitly accept clothes as a bloom and embellishment, Shavian repression cuts out as much decoration as possible and whittles raiment down to bald protection.

He is the apostle of wool, and in flannel and tweed finds salvation. Mr. H. G. Wells describes Mr. Britling as wearing, among other things, a pair of tweed knickerbockers of remarkable bagginess, made from one of those virtuous Socialistic homespun tweeds. Mr. Shaw sometimes wears knickerbockers, but although the tweed may be virtuous, the width is restrained.

Mr. Shaw, with his acute intellect, has always realized the enormous power of clothes. He sees them as a potent force to colour the outlook and direct the habits. He needed the roughness of tweeds and the jar of homely gear as discipline. He could not have fought his fight in the elegant dress of a man about town. The *rôle* of a Red Indian brandishing a tomahawk would have been ineffective in morning coat and spats.

And so he has put aside the suavity of evening dress and dinner clothes; starch has been his abomination; purple and fine linen he has despised. The amenities of fashionable attire would have tamed the rebel and softened the angles into curves.

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"Mr. Bernard Shaw is the apostle of wool."

Photo: Fox.

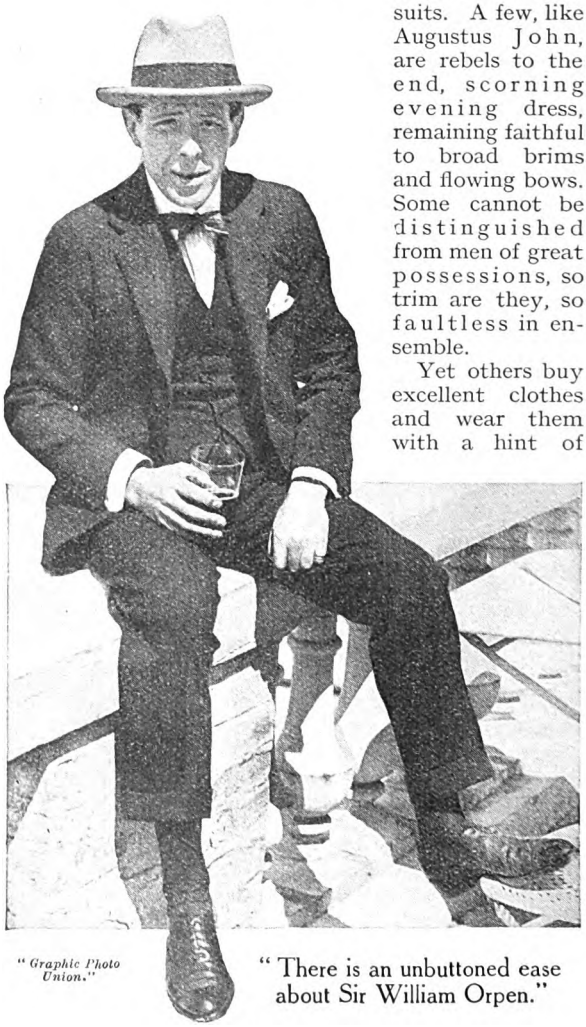
Yet after all is said, when the oracle was seen among his household gods, it must be admitted that he was dressed in sensible fashion. In a brown study sartorially, he is alert enough in other respects.

SIR WILLIAM ORPEN.

ALL artists when young are inclined to be rebels against conventions; if they are very clever they rebel even against the conventions of art. The tacitly accepted dress of the bourgeois is anathema to their artistic souls. Their dislike of the hackneyed leads them to odd manifestations. They wear their overcoat collars turned up and their shoes usually display tubular rolls of sock. Their ties are voluminous, and they affect a picturesque untidiness.

Time passes, and success tones down their eccentricities and presses some of the baroque quality from their attire. As commissions come and patrons multiply they become less unkempt. Society smooths them out; and they go to a fashionable tailor's for their suits. A few, like Augustus John, are rebels to the end, scorning evening dress, remaining faithful to broad brims and flowing bows. Some cannot be distinguished from men of great possessions, so trim are they, so faultless in ensemble.

Yet others buy excellent clothes and wear them with a hint of



"Graphic Photo Union."

"There is an unbuttoned ease about Sir William Orpen."

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artistic carelessness. Sir William Orpen is of this company. There is an unbuttoned ease about him. The tie is not of the magniloquence of Montmartre, yet is of the family. The hat is fashionable, but artistic. As he sits in brilliant sunshine, his trousers are well pulled up; while his socks are slipping down into uncomely wrinkles. It is quite evident, from the *prima facie* evidence of his half hose, that Sir William Orpen may be a knight—but NOT a Knight of the Garter!

MR. NOEL COWARD.

THE art of the actor needs a liking for dressing up; that change of identity which children love and practise. Putting on strange clothes and pretending to be someone else is a natural trait; but as youth passes most folk lose the savour of masquerade. Many worthy citizens are too much themselves, and that is their tragedy: better a touch of motley than no escape from self.

Mr. Noel Coward is playwright as well as actor, and possibly has found it better to give than to receive—parts. The vast majority of authors would read a lightsome comedy in doleful dress; not so the author of "This Year of Grace," who has a sense of fitness. In the accompanying photograph he wears a white suit of cool duck or crash. This smart and well-laundered outfit recalls sunshine and the tinkle of ice in a champagne glass. It is of Palm Beach and Pêche Melba all compact.

Such a dainty costume bears the stamp of success, for no man would choose such a delicate creation from his wardrobe unless sure of himself. From that linen garb emanates the irresponsible charm of musical comedy; a land of milk-white garb and a honeyed life. It conjures up a blithesome butterfly existence with trouble banished and misery screened.

It is rare indeed to see a coat of washing material—a harsh term for such ethereal garb—produced with such grace. A wondrous elegance curves the lapels with lines of beauty. The pearl buttons hint of the cool depths of Neptune's kingdom.

"Mr. Noel Coward has a sense of fitness."

"Graphic Photo Union."

MR. J. H. THOMAS.

THE attitude of the Labour leaders towards dress is amusing. No whips are sent out; it is not a party question, and there is much confusion. In the ranks are those who look upon dress clothes as a sign of bloated capitalism and the top-hat as a symbol of privilege. Another section thinks that now they are in the Promised Land they may as well partake of the milk and honey.

The thoughtful among the Socialists fear the pervasive influence of attire. The result of co-opting the suave wardrobe of Liberals and Conservatives is to narrow the breach

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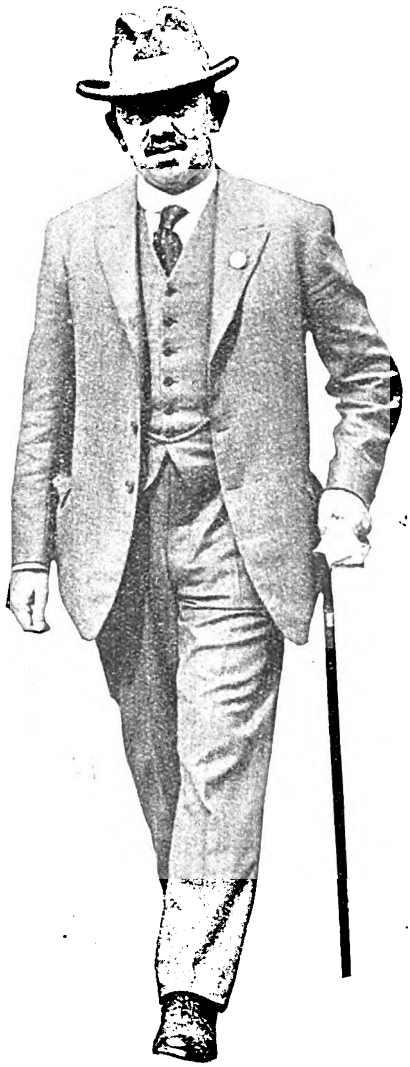

"Mr. J. H. Thomas makes the best of both worlds."

Photo: Central News.

between them. They look askance at leaders who imitate their opponents in habits and outer aspect. Capitalism must be fought, not in fine raiment, but in rude array. The walls of Jericho will never fall to men clad in the same uniform as the besieged. Capital levy was doomed immediately Labour Ministers wore Levée dress.

Some try facing both ways, making an irreproachable toilet for Society and meeting their supporters in clothes of studied negligence. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald once apologized to a meeting for having worn trousers with creases down the front.

Mr. J. H. Thomas makes the best of both worlds with a Janus-like duality. At a Conference of the National Union of Railwaymen he appears in workmanlike kit. His double-breasted reefer is unfastened; the flap of one pocket is in and the other out. His trousers are baggy and innocent of a smart crease. Even at a garden party he wears a lounge suit, unbuttoned and informal.

Yet we see the reverse side when he changes his coat at night. Mr. Thomas frankly revels in evening dress and all that goes with it. With him "glad rags" is more than a phrase, it is an exhalation. An expanse of shirt front induces expansiveness, literally and figuratively, when he is in full rig. The wing collar helps him to soar; and the silk facings of his coat are emblems of success. In a boiled shirt and dress coat he is more social than Socialist.

LORD LONSDALE.

LORD LONSDALE is a fine old English gentleman, and a sportsman of the first water. These attributes are stamped on his kit, and emerge in graphic details; they also show themselves in spirited departures from the trite. His frock-coat and silk hat, with his inevitable long cigar, are familiar at fashionable race meetings, horse shows, tournaments, and other smart functions.

When Lord Lonsdale decides to have a flutter, and back his fancy for the unusual, there is no timid trifling or fumbling with fashion; for his whims have an air of magnificence. Indeed, the noble Earl's sartorial sensations have a punch.

Lord Lonsdale is fond of a white waistcoat with formal day dress; and this symbolizes his exquisite urbanity. At Ascot he invariably sports a shirt striped with pink. On a sultry day at Epsom he has been known to create a mild sensation by wearing cool and spotless duck trousers. A country race meeting saw him once in sandals.

He goes to Goodwood as a country gentleman, but also as a great noble. Should the day be sunny, he will wear a light-coloured tweed suit. The morning coat is not on modern lines, but carries large flaps and vast pockets at the waist—actually a shooting coat. His hat is a white bowler; and the yellow waistcoat matches the chaise attended by postillions. Should the sky be overcast, he will substitute a dark brown suit and soft felt hat, with a pale yellow carnation in his coat.

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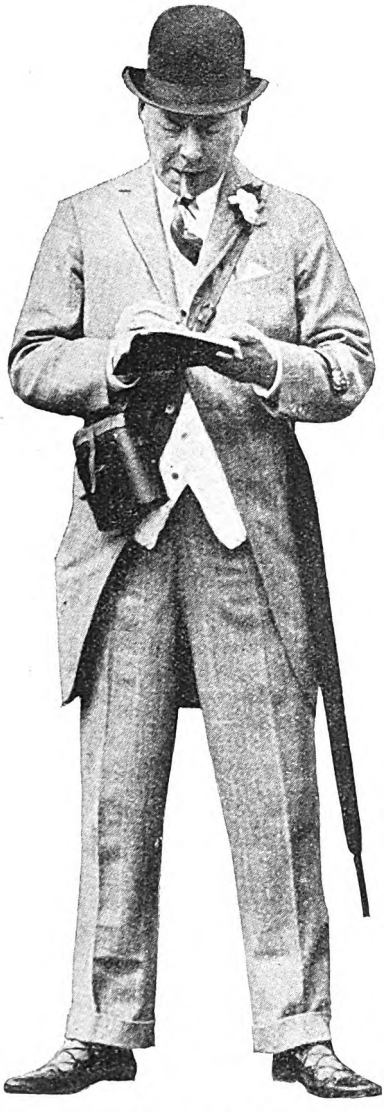

"Lord Lonsdale's sartorial sensations have a punch."

Photo: Sport & General.

Most folk will remember Lord Lonsdale as a study in black and white. The stately Victorian frock, with a hint of uniform in it; trousers lit up by white lines; a snowy waistcoat and a lily-white tie; gleaming boots with blanched uppers. In his lapel a flower, emblem of the milk of human kindness. To crown all, the lustrous topper, redolent of an age more spick and span and of more courtly manners.

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT.

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT is interested in the whole texture of life, not only in the finished web, but in every thread of the warp and woof. With such a zest for existence it is no great wonder that he is engrossed with clothes. In his thoroughgoing manner he dresses for effect, and achieves it.

From his early days the decoration of the body has occupied his thoughts; and it is

"Beau Bennett."

"Graphic Photo Union."

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recorded that he was the successful editor of a ladies' fashion journal. Had he lived in a former age he would have rivalled Disraeli, Dickens, Lytton, and Ainsworth in gorgeousness of apparel.

Mr. Bennett dresses with studied effect. There is a plot in his outfit, well constructed and closely knit, with flashes of characterization and revelation. The style is the man. The accent of the Five Towns has been lost, and he slightly accentuates Mayfair. He collaborates with his tailor and art transcends nature.

In his lounge suits the assemblage is harmonious down to the socks; and the lustre of patent shoes imparts a happy ending. When he dons a morning coat it is of impeccable cut; the substance of his trousers is neat, with lines that scan. A jewelled tie-pin flashes like an epigram, and his collar displays careful polish.

With evening dress Mr. Bennett changes his style. Simple diction is sacrificed for an ornate flourish, and the adjectives are a thought too redundant. If one may venture a criticism, it is that a little pruning would be beneficial. The pink carnation in the silken rever is a happy touch in itself; but the exaggerated show of handkerchief spoils the effect. Indeed, the floral display plus the napery overbalances the left side. The jewelled fob-chain with pendant seal further helps to tilt the scale.

Mr. Arnold Bennett is not only civilized but sophisticated, and the watch worn in the fob is more than an anachronism, it is a theatrical gesture. In conjunction with the pleated shirt it suggests the bucks of the Regency; and one instinctively mutters "Beau Bennett." He whose creed is to make the best of life contrives to make the most of himself.

"In one garment Sir Thomas Beecham is consciously the impresario."

"Graphic Photo Union."

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM.

DRESSING the part is out of fashion, and few men betray their art or calling by their clothes. Yet there are exceptions, and these possess the lure of legibility; for most folk, when they do essay the task, prefer a plain statement to an indeterminate smear.

In one garment which he dons for ceremonial occasions, Sir Thomas Beecham is consciously the impresario. It is an overcoat scored and embellished with astrakhan, whose glossy curls, covering lapels and collar, have always been the sign-manual of the arts—almost the seal of genius. But like the arts, the astrakhan-trimmed overgarment has become respectable; and from the purlieus of the Strand has reached Mayfair.

There is no strong motive or theme in Sir Thomas Beecham's other clothes, yet the notes are usually melodious and the orchestration effective. Great conductors are alive to the power of presentation; and their dress coats—harmonious compositions—have always a smoothness of execution at the back. When Sir Thomas is in evening dress we have a nocturne: not dreamy, but black with electric flashes; vibrant, full of concentrated power.

Bereft of the Russian note of astrakhan, without the diapason of dress clothes, he is a symphony in lighter key. There is a strain on the top button of his jacket (possibly from a welter of notes in the pocket); but his handkerchief is a melodious trill. The trousers are worn a trifle long, breaking on the boot with a disturbed rhythm; while the tweed overcoat, carried over the arm, is well scored with lines, and is an exercise in fortissimo.

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The Doubtful Guest

By

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Illustrated by
S. ABBEY

DETECTIVE BRETT found the Chief Inspector waiting for him impatiently when, in response to an urgent message, he hurried upstairs to his room. The latter looked up from his desk and handed across the letter which he had been studying.

"Fellow may be a bloodthirsty brute all right," he remarked, "but he certainly keeps his sense of humour."

"Matthew!" Brett exclaimed eagerly.

The other nodded. Brett smoothed out the double sheet of note-paper and read:—

Ritz Hotel,
London.
17th September.

Dear Mr. Inspector Absolom,—

This is to let you and your bright-eyed boy know that I am settling down in London, and so far like it very much. You are giving me better sport than I expected; in fact, up to the present, I am afraid, honours can be considered only even.

I am still puzzled about that Endale Street raid. It was most annoying to lose the whole of the results of one of the most brilliantly-planned burglaries of modern times, and also one of my most valuable men. However, the Ellacott jewels are far better than I expected and those few trifles at Howson's were worth picking up.

I had some idea of paying you a call at Scotland Yard, but I am afraid that I might find your hospitality a little too pressing. I can quite understand your anxiety to meet me, though, and I will give you a chance. Madame la Comtesse de Grignolles—I hope I have her name right—is entertaining some foreign notabilities to-night at her mansion in Grosvenor Square. I propose to be present. It would make matters easier for me if you would leave a card of invitation with the major-domo, in a blank envelope, if you please—I will fill in the name myself. If, however, you do not know Madame la Comtesse well enough to impose so far upon her hospitality, I shall find my way in somehow or other. To catch a glimpse of those wonderful jewels, I would run even greater risks.

Au revoir, Mr. Absolom. Of course, if I am thoroughly out of luck, we may meet again very soon indeed—you as host and I as guest—but I cling to my star.

MATTHEW.

"Do you imagine these communications are genuine?" the Chief Inspector asked, as his subordinate returned the letter.

The latter nodded.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he decided. "The fellow has just that sort of humour. There is a purpose underlying all these jeering letters, too. He wants to put us off our poise, to make us just a little too eager."

The Chief nodded thoughtfully.

"The question now arises," he said, "as to what steps we shall take. Later, of course, we must draw up a precise plan of campaign. At present, perhaps the most important thing to be done is to warn the Comtesse."

"What shall you say to her, sir?"

"I shall just tell her that we have reason to believe that an international jewel thief intends to be present at her reception to-night. By the by, she'll be here in a moment or two."

"Has she heard anything, then?"

"Only from us," the Chief replied. "I rang up directly I got this letter to ask for an interview. The reply was that she preferred not to have Scotland Yard men at the house, and would call here instead. Here she is, I expect."

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A commissionaire entered the room, bearing a card. The Chief nodded.

"Show the Comtesse in," he directed.

The Comtesse was following hard upon the man's heels. She bustled in, diffusing a waft of perfume and a general sense of unrest. She was a woman of fair complexion, medium height, inclined to be stout, with restless, uneasy eyes. She carried a small Pekingese under her arm, and she anticipated Inspector Absolom's word or two of greeting.

"So this is Scotland Yard!" she exclaimed. "Not nearly so exciting as it sounds. Are you the gentleman who rang me up?"

"I am," Absolom acknowledged. "This is one of my staff, Mr. Brett."

The Comtesse glanced at the latter, and accepted a chair.

"SO someone is going to try to steal my jewels?"

"We have reason to believe," was the cautious reply, "that an attempt is to be made."

"Well, I suppose you can protect me?" the Comtesse asked. "What are the police for, and all your famous detective staff, if they can't look after us? You are warned. Very well, that ought to be enough for you. Why should I bother, if you do your duty?"

The Chief was a little taken aback.

"We hope very much, Comtesse," he said, "to be able to protect you, but, on the other hand, it is well known that you possess jewels of extraordinary value. From the information we have received, we gather that the most famous jewel thief in Europe is on their track. He means to get to your reception somehow or other, and, although we shall naturally do our best to protect you, it seems only a reasonable thing to suggest that for this one night you do not wear your more priceless possessions."

"I call that nonsense. To-night more than any night I wish to wear the finest jewellery I possess."

Inspector Absolom stroked his chin.

"That seems rather a pity, Comtesse," he murmured. "Might one inquire why?"

"Simply because I have more people coming to my house to-night than have ever been there before," the lady declared. "My first husband didn't cut much ice with people in the smart set here. He was a Knight—would have been a Baronet if he'd lived long enough.

"Well, when he died I married the Comte de Grignolles," the Comtesse went on, "but he wasn't much good either, except to spend my money. It was partly through him I invested so much in jewels. I gave parties in London, but no one of any account came to them, and in France it was worse. My husband wouldn't have anything to do with the modern crowd, the foreigners who had just settled in France, and his own set didn't seem to care about me very much. When he died I came back to London. I have made a few friends. Now, to-night I've got one of the greatest men in France for my guest. He owns the next estate to ours in the Dauphiné—a sort of connection of my husband's really. Directly he promised to come, I sent out another five hundred invitations, and practically everyone's accepted. Now you calmly tell me that I am not to wear my most wonderful jewels. I shall do just as I please about it, and if you can't protect me—well, you'll hear about it, that's all."

The Chief visibly stiffened.

"My advice to you, Comtesse," he said, "was purely a matter of common sense. It seems to me excessively foolish to run unnecessary risks. We shall, of course, do our best to protect you, but you will understand that we can only protect those who are willing to help themselves."

"Tell me what you want me to do?"

"You have a secretary, I suppose?"

"Of course I have," the lady snapped.

"Very well," the Inspector continued; "send out a card this morning to everyone to whom you have issued an invitation, telling them that they will be asked to countersign their invitations upon arrival, and, although every facility will be afforded to them, it would be better for them to come a little earlier. Two of your most trusted servants can probably pass in anyone whom they absolutely recognize. The rest must write their names at the backs of their invitation cards."

"What good will that do?"

"It may do none at all," Absolom admitted. "On the other hand, it is a precautionary measure against the appearance of an uninvited guest. Furthermore, I shall send six men whom I shall ask you to furnish with your liveries, and I shall want a card of invitation for this gentleman here—Mr. Philip Brett—and a young lady, Lady Muriel Carter."

"Lady Muriel's got one," the Comtesse declared. "She's got one, and accepted. What else?"

"Mr. Brett must also have authority from you to detain and question any one of your guests whom he suspects."

"It seems a lot of fuss," the Comtesse grumbled. "Well, I'll do everything you say, and it will be your fault if there's trouble. I tell you frankly that I'm going to wear my 'Tear Drop.'"

"A very valuable jewel?"

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Chief? Can't you see him looking for the mark we should leave on the back? Besides, he knows perfectly well he'll have no trouble in getting his card of invitation. Amongst seven or eight hundred people there are certain to be one or two absentees whose cards could be got hold of."

"What I can't make out," Absolom reflected, "is why Matthew should go out of his way to warn us. Do you suppose it is sheer bravado?"

"Something of the sort," Brett acknowledged. "You know, sir, I have a theory of my own about Matthew. I think that he is undoubtedly the most brilliant criminal of modern times—a genius to his finger-tips—and, that being so, he is also, naturally, just a little mad. I figure it out that excitement has become an absolute necessity to him, that he is getting madder every day, and that he deliberately plays for and takes tremendous risks. After all, he is only human. Some day he will make the one small mistake. And then——"

Brett broke off in his sentence. For a man of mild features and speech, he was during those few seconds unrecognizable. His mouth was set like a trap, and there were two deep lines starting from its corners cutting into his cheek. There was bloodshed in his eyes. His Chief watched him curiously.

"Go easy about this job, young fellow," he advised. "Remember, as Matthew has pointed out himself, honours are even up till now. It was a great feat to get back a hundred thousand pounds' worth of jewellery, even if we missed Matthew himself. When his time comes, he'll kill a dozen men sooner than be taken alive."

"If he has the chance."

"Lady Muriel and you will go together, of course," Absolom went on. "Are there any other arrangements you would like made?"

"I should like two of our men who are going to wear Madame de Grignolles' livery in the entrance hall," Brett begged, "and I should like two or three more in plain clothes mixed up with the ordinary police who will be on duty outside. The getting away from Grosvenor Square ought not to be too easy, even for Matthew. Then I shall want Brooks and another man in touch with me all the time."

The Chief Inspector nodded.

"Give your own orders to the sergeant, Brett," he agreed. "And good luck!"

THE reception at Grosvenor Square was long talked about amongst those who were fortunate enough to be present. The whole of the stately hall, the great staircase leading to the first floor, and the reception rooms, wherever space was to be found, were banked with marvellous roses, to procure which every corner of England and Southern Europe had been searched. The greater part of the new Russian Ballet, then at the height of its success, had been engaged, and the two most famous opera singers of the day had risked the breaking of a contract to be present. Royalty had expressed its deep regret at being able to pay only a flying visit on a night of many engagements, but towards the hour when the supper rooms were to be opened, rumours of a Lucullan banquet seemed to have brought together a crowd which tried to its utmost capacity one of the largest houses in London. A little breathless, Brett and Lady Muriel, who had seen nothing of each other since their arrival from the Ritz Grill, were fortunate enough, about half-way through the proceedings, to find a couple of chairs near the door of the main reception room.

"For Heaven's sake tell me what it is all about," he begged. "First of all, who is the Comtesse de Grignolles? She came to Scotland Yard this morning, and the Chief and I both thought her terrible."

"They call her 'The Knight's Lady,' because she is always in shining armour. She is supposed to have several million pounds' worth of jewels—all diamonds."

"How did she come by them?"

"The usual way," Lady Muriel replied, with perhaps just a shade of bitterness in her tone. "Her first husband was an English Knight—a Yorkshire leather merchant, with a fabulous amount of money. Her second she met in Paris—bought him for the amount of his debts and half a million—and he died, crushed, within a year or two. She owns the ancestral château at Grignolles, where she spends a few months of every year, and that, I understand, is how she became acquainted with the guest of the evening. His château is the adjoining one, the other side of Grignolles."

"Tell me about him."

"Ah, now you come to someone really distinguished. I only know a few of his titles, but Monsieur le Général, Duc d'Angoulême and Saint Creux, is the only one of the real aristocracy of France who made a great name during the War. He was a very brilliant leader and tactician, and, but for his birth, they say that he would have received a far greater share of the credit for the saving of Paris and Verdun than he did. However, he has nearly all the honours possible. I am not at all sure that he isn't a Marshal of France, and, though he retired from active service as soon as the War was over, his name is still one to conjure with. . . . I believe they're

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going in to supper! Look, isn't it rather like a royal procession? These parvenue women turn everything into a circus."

THE great crowd was dividing to make an avenue, down which a double file of people were crossing the floor towards the banqueting rooms, where a famous band was playing. The Comtesse, her fingers upon the sleeve of her distinguished guest, and diamonds which had graced the occupant of a throne glittering upon her neck and bosom, stopped every now and then to speak to a friend. She was magnificently dressed, and not without a certain presence, but lacked altogether the naturalness and grand air which would have enabled her to pass with dignity through such an assembly. As she drew near to them, she recognized Lady Muriel, and paused.

"Lady Muriel," she gushed, "I haven't seen you before, have I? I'm afraid you weren't able to get near us in the reception rooms. I know you would like to meet my neighbour. Duc, this is Lady Muriel Carter—Général le Duc d'Angoulême."

The Duc acknowledged the introduction with an absence of enthusiasm for which a thousand similar exploits during the evening was certainly some excuse. He seemed a great deal older than either of them had expected. His face was deeply lined, and his expression one of hopeless boredom. At Lady Muriel's few murmured words in perfect French, however, he relaxed very slightly, and answered her in the same language.

"*Enchanté*, Lady Muriel!" he murmured. "I have been well acquainted with connections of yours at your Embassy. This is what my neighbour, the Comtesse, calls 'meeting a few friends'!" he added, with a wave of the hand—an almost pathetic gesture.

His hostess laughed as she drew him away.

"Ah, but, mon Général," she reminded him, "think what a quiet life we lead at Grignolles."

Lady Muriel and her companion resumed their seats. The former's eyes still followed the disappearing figure of the Comtesse. Brett, on the other hand, seemed more interested by the little group of people by whom she was surrounded.

"That woman," he declared tersely, "ought to be locked up. You know better than I do, Lady Muriel, but are those diamonds all real?"

"Absolutely," she assured him. "It is her boast that she has never owned a single article of artificial jewellery in her life, and I believe that it is the truth, too. Last year she had a wonderful necklace stolen at Cannes. She didn't mind. She was wearing a more gorgeous one still the next night. The single diamond she has around her neck—'the Tear Drop,' they call it—really did belong to the Czarina. She is supposed to have given six hundred thousand pounds for it."

"Seems to me," he remarked, his restless eyes still following the departing group, "that I had better set about looking for Matthew."

"Oh, do let's have some supper first," she begged. "You're just as likely to find yourself seated next to him as to come across him wandering about. Look, the ordinary people like us are all going in now, by the other entrance."

"One moment," he begged. "You know a great many of these people by sight, I suppose?"

"Most of them," she admitted.

"There are about a dozen following close behind the Comtesse. You can see them from here. They evidently belong to her supper table."

Lady Muriel nodded.

"The *élite*," she remarked. "One of them is an aunt of mine. She pretended not to see me. It's such a terrible crime, alas, to be poor nowadays!"

"You recognize most of them, I imagine?"

"All except one."

There was a swift flash of light in Brett's eyes.

"Describe him," he begged quickly.

"A rather tall, dark young man. Looked a little Jewish. He wore an eyeglass, and he was awfully like Leopold Barstowe."

"Sure it wasn't he, I suppose?"

"Quite," she answered, firmly. "I shouldn't be giving away a secret if I were to tell you that I once had a chance of being a Jewish peeress. Do let's have supper now, please. You know what these crushes are like. Half the good things are gone in the first twenty minutes."

They moved towards the supper room, but Brett had made a little sign, and a footman who had threaded his way through the throng with difficulty accosted them. Brett leaned towards him as he offered his tray of glasses.

"Any report?" he whispered.

"None," the man answered.

"Follow me as far as the entrance to the supper room," Brett enjoined.

The crowd was thinning now, and they arrived in time to secure a small table. At the far end of the room a very select party were seated at a round table, presided over by the Comtesse. On each side were several smaller tables half hidden by the pillars.

"The outside man by the fourth pillar,

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counting from the right," Brett pointed out, softly. "Tall, dark, rather Jewish, and wearing an eyeglass."

"I see him," the pseudo-footman acknowledged.

"We'll have to take a risk," Brett confided. "He's the only person we've been able to get a line on up till now. If he stays and sees the thing through, we sha'n't have to worry. If he tries to go within half an hour after supper, detain him on any excuse you like, and send for me."

The man bowed, and wandered on with his tray of glasses. Lady Muriel gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"I am just as keen as you are," she assured him, "but much greedier. Do you know that they have ortolans stuffed with truffles, vol-au-vents and pâtés which came over by air this afternoon from Strasburg, and basketfuls of real strawberries? Heaps of everything, too. I've ordered for both of us."

He smiled.

"On the whole," he remarked, "it is perhaps just as well that we have a little time to spare."

THE supper fulfilled every anticipation, but the hour which followed was a trifle breathless. The rooms were now packed to such an extent that to move more than a yard at a time was difficult. Brett managed at last, however, to come once more into touch with his underling, who had been trying for some minutes to attract his attention.

"I've done the trick, sir," he whispered, "but I am rather afraid we put our foot in it. He's downstairs in the waiting-room with Brooks and Chalmers. He was streaking off as soon as they'd all left the supper room."

"Did he make any trouble?"

"Like hell he did with his tongue," the man replied. "He didn't attempt anything else. I just told him that by the Comtesse's orders no one was allowed to leave before two o'clock without a permit signed by her secretary. I promised I'd get him the permit, and there he is, waiting."

"Good," Brett approved. "I'll work my way down there as soon as I can."

At that moment there was a little stir, and people began to give way. Madame la Comtesse and her distinguished guest were crossing the floor towards the concert room to hear the world's greatest singer. As they came in sight, Brett, responding to the eager pressure of Lady Muriel's fingers upon his arm, stood on tiptoe and watched. The Comtesse was still smiling to right and left, still throwing a word here and there to acquaintances, but there was a distinct change in her expression. She seemed to have grown paler, and her left hand, flashing with diamonds, was lifted to her throat. As she passed by, Lady Muriel gave a gasp.

"You'd better get downstairs," she whispered. "After all, she's a brave woman. Can't you see what's happened—and she knows."

He looked at her inquiringly, and she leaned a little closer.

"The 'Tear Drop' diamond has gone."

BRETT, opening the door of the room on the ground floor which had been pointed out to him, found himself in a simply but comfortably furnished apartment of the waiting-room type. There were rows of chairs along the walls, a table covered with magazines in the middle of the floor, and other evidences that it was a room in which callers of the business type were received. One obviously plain-clothes policeman was standing on duty just across the threshold. Brooks, in ordinary evening clothes, was seated near the window. Lounging against the table, and apparently absorbed in a copy of *Punch*, was the man whom Lady Muriel had pointed out as being the one stranger amongst the Comtesse's *entourage*. At close quarters, the slight hook to his nose and the protruding curve of his red lips were more noticeable. Otherwise he would have been passably good-looking. He wore his clothes correctly, but it was apparent that he was making a great effort to appear at his ease. He looked up coolly as the detective entered and threw down the copy of *Punch*.

"Are you the person from whom I may demand an explanation of what has happened to me?" he inquired.

Brett studied him closely, and with growing disappointment. Face to face, he was not in the least the type of man he had expected. Matthew, however, was clever enough to see to that.

"Yes, I suppose I am," he answered. "At any rate, I am responsible for your detention."

"Then let me tell you you're going to find yourself in trouble before long. Be so good as to explain at once. What the devil's all this nonsense about a permit to go out?"

"Pure invention," Brett admitted, fortified by a little information Lady Muriel had whispered in his ear as he had left the reception room. "No permit is required."

For a moment the man was speechless.

"Who the devil are you?" he spluttered.

"I am Detective Brett of Scotland Yard," was the curt reply. "Where's your card of invitation?"

The man drew it from his pocket and threw it upon the table.

"There it is," he pointed out. "I stuck

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my name on the back as everyone else did at the entrance."

Brett picked it up and looked at it. Then he turned it over.

"'The Earl of Barstowe,'" he said, quietly. "Is that your name?"

"Of course it is," was the angry reply.

Brett leaned a little across the table, studying the other's expression. With every moment now his satisfaction increased. Eyed under a strong light, there was surely something not quite natural about that black hair. The man's uneasiness, too, was obviously becoming acute.

"I am told," Brett said, calmly, "that Lord Barstowe is in Paris. I have, in fact, just been introduced to someone who received a telephone message from him this afternoon. His cousin is here, though—Felix Shobel. Shall I send for him?"

The young man scowled.

"Don't waste your time!" he exclaimed. "If I'm found out, I'm found out."

"You admit that your name is not Barstowe?"

"Yes."

"What are you here for, then?"

"A special reason. I meant to come. I had a special reason for coming. I am always being mistaken for Lord Barstowe. I came in with his card."

"So I perceive," Brett observed. "Why?"

"That's my business."

The detective smiled.

"You may find," he said, "that it also concerns us. What is your real name?"

"Vandoorn," was the surly acknowledgment, after a moment's pause.

"Anyone here to identify you?"

"Several. Lord Partington for one."

Brett whispered in the ear of the man standing near the door, who at once nodded and withdrew.

"You said just now," Brett went on, turning back again, "that you wished to be present to-night for a certain reason. Was that reason connected in any way——"

"I'm damned if I answer any more questions!" Vandoorn declared, springing to his feet. "Curse you, what are you all on to me for? I've a right to be here, if I'm clever enough to get a card. Let me go!"

"Presently," was the curt reply. "First of all I am going to search you. Up with them!" he shouted. "Like hell! No good trying that, Vandoorn."

The young man's hand had stolen behind him, but Brett's draw was the quicker. His own automatic was pointed straight across the table. Vandoorn's hands were unwillingly raised.

"Get him by the arms," the detective directed, briefly. "Handcuff him if he's awkward."

Vandoorn had lost by this time every trace of his former composure. He was absolutely helpless in Brooks's grasp.

"I won't be searched," he insisted. "You have no right to do anything of the sort."

Neither of the men took any notice of him. With a significant little glance across the table, the policeman drew from his captive's pocket a small automatic and threw it amongst the magazines. Brett took it up and knocked out the cartridges. A pocket-book followed, and suddenly, in the midst of a paroxysm of struggles, the searcher, a little out of breath, produced a fragment of platinum chain to which was attached a marvellously shaped gem. It lay there sparkling in the light—immense, astounding, a single diamond in the shape of a huge tear drop.

"SO that's that!" Brett observed, calmly. "How did you manage it, my friend, and who the devil are you really?"

"I didn't manage it at all," was the muttered reply. "It's my own property."

Brett laughed outright, and even Brooks permitted himself to smile. Their captive looked as though he could have killed both of them. Then there was a knock at the door. Brett covered the jewel with his handkerchief.

"Come in," he directed, shortly.

The Comtesse herself entered, followed by a short, fair-haired man, who glanced around inquiringly.

"My name's Partington," he announced. "What's the trouble here?"

"May I ask whether you recognize this man?" Brett inquired.

Lord Partington screwed in his eyeglass and nodded.

"Gad," he exclaimed, "it's Mark Vandoorn! I thought you'd get into trouble about this, young fellow."

"I don't know what the trouble is, my lord," the person addressed protested, glaring defiantly at Brett. "I got in on another man's card, but there's lots of them do that. They tried to stop my leaving the house, searched me, and now they're calling me a thief."

"You might mention," Brett intervened, "that not only were you here, as you have admitted, with a bogus card of invitation, but that when we searched you we discovered, first of all a fully charged automatic, and secondly, this!"

He lifted the handkerchief. The Comtesse gave a little cry and sprang forward. She was about to grasp the jewel. Suddenly she stopped, and stared at it transfixed.

"What does this mean?" she demanded.

The young man broke in feverishly, and even in that moment of trouble Brett was

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swift to notice the change from the cynical, assumed voice of the Gentile to the natural guttural of the Jew.

"I can tell you all about it, lady. These men from Scotland Yard got it into their heads that I'm a jewel thief, and that I was here to steal your ladyship's 'Tear Drop.' Now, my lord, stand by me—what's my job? What's my father's job?"

"Vandoorn's," Lord Partington confided, "are perhaps the most expert manufacturers of high-class imitation jewellery in the world."

"That's right," the young man declared, eagerly. "We are. We've got an order—I can't tell you from whom—we don't disclose our clients' names—but we've got an order to imitate the Comtesse de Grignolles' famous 'Tear Drop.' 'Alexandra's Tear

"I won't be searched," he insisted. "You have no right to do anything of the sort."

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Drop,' it's called in the trade. Well, there it is, on the table. We've done the job, but dad wasn't quite satisfied. He told me to wangle a card for this show to-night, and to come and have a look at the real thing as close as I could, and to compare it with ours. We daren't ask the Comtesse to oblige us, because naturally she wouldn't want it copied, but I knew Lord Barstowe's valet, and I got him to pass me over his master's card. Everyone says we're as like as two peas, and not a soul spotted me until just as I was leaving. I got a seat at a supper table close to the Comtesse's, where I could see the 'Tear Drop' close to, and I found out where we ain't quite right. As soon as I'd done that, I was off home, and then the whole of Scotland Yard jumped on my neck. If the 'Tear Drop's' been stolen, that ain't nothing to do with me. We aren't thieves, and don't need to be. Go and ask our bankers, if you don't believe me. Dad's worth fifty thou. if he's worth sixpence."

There was a moment's silence. Brett found it hard to collect his thoughts. Somewhere was trickery. But where?

"Why do you carry that thing?" he asked, pointing to the automatic.

"Ask your grandmother," was the angry rejoinder. "You don't suppose we don't have to handle plenty of the real stuff too! The gems we copy have to be done from the original. There isn't one of us in the business who don't carry a gun."

There was a knock at the door. The major-domo of the household entered. He carried a telegram upon a salver.

"My lady," he said, presenting it to the Comtesse, "your secretary opened this, and thought that you ought to see it at once."

The Comtesse picked it up. As she read, her eyes grew wide with surprise.

"Can anyone tell me what this means?" she demanded, and read it aloud:—

"'Château de Saint Creux, Grignolles, September 17th. Deeply regret important affairs prevent my leaving as hoped this week will pay my respects when next in London. D'Angoulême.'"

EVERYONE exchanged glances of mute stupefaction. Brett, however, was already three parts of the way towards the solution. He stood by the Comtesse, and his grey eyes were insistent.

"Madame," he demanded, "how well did you know the Duc d'Angoulême before this evening?"

The Comtesse palpably hesitated.

"We were neighbours at Grignolles," she faltered. "We have exchanged visits."

"To what extent. Have you ever been in the same room with him before?"

"Not exactly. When I returned his visit I saw him walking in the garden."

"You were surprised, then," Brett went on mercilessly, "when he proposed this visit to you?"

"I was rather," the Comtesse admitted.

Brett swung round to the major-domo.

"Is Monsieur le Duc still upstairs?" he demanded. "I should say it was fifty to one against it."

"Monsieur le Duc has charged me with his excuses to your ladyship," the major-domo announced, turning to the Comtesse. "He complained of fatigue and indisposition. I took him down the back stairs to avoid the crowd, and found him a taxicab. He went off two minutes ago."

"He was an impostor?" the Comtesse gasped.

"He was an impostor," Brett assured her, grimly, "who has gone off with your 'Tear Drop' diamond."

"And you allowed it," she exclaimed. "You—the police—you had your own way here all the time—and you were tricked like that!"

Brett drew himself up.

"Madame la Comtesse," he reminded her coldly, "you present to all London the Duc d'Angoulême, Maréchal of France—your neighbour—your intimate friend. The police are not seers. We give you credit for knowing the person for whom you design so wonderful an entertainment, and for telling the truth."

The Comtesse had nothing to say. There was still another silence, and Brett turned towards the door. There was obvious, though hopeless, work to be done, but at that moment it was his one desire that nobody should see his face. Somewhere in the suburbs, at a comfortable forty miles an hour, with lights blazing down upon a bogus number, and a bogus footman on the box, a huge limousine was rushing into the country. Inside a man with a cigarette in his mouth was calmly changing his clothes, discarding the somewhat conspicuous uniform of a Maréchal of France for the lounge habiliments of a gentleman of leisure.

(Next month: "The Little Yellow Birds.")

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Paid in Error

By CHARLES RIDEAUX

Illustrated by
L. G. ILLINGWORTH

AT eleven o'clock on a shining June morning Matt Harvey walked into the Paris branch of the Southern Bank of America, and presented a cheque for two hundred and ninety francs. He was an American citizen, forty-eight years old, hard-up and dissolute. His hat was greasy, his blue suit had not been brushed for weeks, his shoes were run over at the heels, and his linen was dirty. But the brisk young clerk who whisked his cheque underneath the grille did not pause to look at him twice. In Paris you can't judge people by their clothes. There is often no money in the pockets of an Avenue de l'Opéra suit, and the girl who looks as if she has just finished spending a hundred thousand francs in the Rue de la Paix may be a typist earning eight hundred a month.

The clerk turned the cheque over to see the endorsement.

"Have you got your passport with you?" he asked.

"Behold it!" said Matt, facetiously, pulling it out of his pocket. "And you can take it from me, my son, that that cheque's all right. You can see where it came from—the American Tourist Company. I expect they could draw cheques for a million and still be solvent. If you want to know what I'm going to do with the money, I'm going to put it on Rose Girl for the three o'clock at Longchamps."

He rested his arms on the counter, and smiled blearily through the grille.

"It will be unfortunate if Rose Girl loses," the brisk young man said dryly as he glanced at the figures on the face of the cheque. Just at that moment another customer approached the counter and the bank clerk looked up.

"Rose Girl, did you say?" he murmured to Matt. "If I were a betting man I should say that here is a lucky omen."

And with his eye on the new customer—a pretty girl, Matt noticed, and with a spray of rose-buds fastened to her dress—the brisk young man handed the cheque to one of a row of clerks who were seated at a tall desk behind the counter.

"Sure thing about Rose Girl," said Matt, pushing his hat over his eyes and scratching the back of his head. "She's going to walk away with that race. It's hers on form, weight, and distance; and I've had a sure hunch. When I came out this morning the first thing I saw was a girl selling roses. And now here's a second girl with a rose. If that isn't a sign from Heaven, I don't know one when I see it."

The young man smiled in a superior manner, and remarked that he didn't know anything about horse-racing. Matt went on talking garrulously. In a few moments the cheque, verified and initialled, was handed back from the desk behind the counter, and the brisk young man opened his money-drawer. He brought out a packet of new one thousand franc notes, and began flicking them over. Matt suddenly stopped talking and looked on in tense silence. The rapid fingers flicked twenty-one times, then drew out a thin sheaf of notes, and pushed the rest of the packet underneath the grille.

"Twenty-nine thousand," said the brisk young man. "They're new notes packed in series, so there's no necessity to count them, but do so if you wish."

Matt stared at them stupidly, then looked up and gulped.

"Are you sure this is all right?" he asked.

The young man gave him a cold glance.

"Quite sure, sir," he said, preparing to attend to the girl with the roses. "But please count them. Perhaps you wouldn't mind moving a little farther along the counter. There are other people waiting."

"All right, all right," Matt said, thickly, "I won't bother to count 'em."

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He stuffed the notes in his pocket and left the bank.

"Ten pounds in francs?" said the brisk young man to the rose girl. "Please write down your name, address, and nationality."

Matt went blindly along the Boulevard in the sunlight, turned down the narrow Rue des Capucines, and entered Mike's Bar. He went through to the room at the back, and sat down heavily in his usual corner.

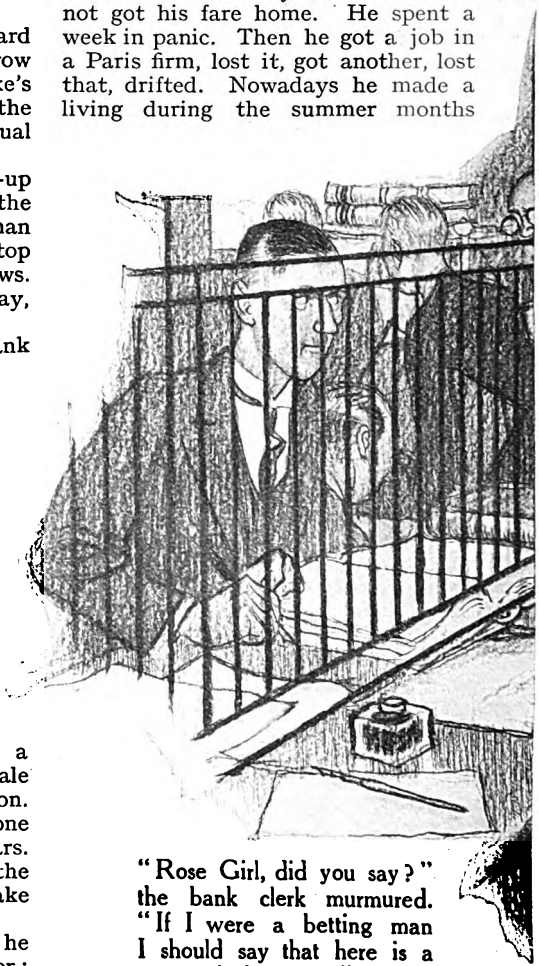
Mike's Bar is the meeting-place of hard-up Americans in Paris, but at that time of the day the only people there were a Frenchman and his *gigolette*. The rows of marble-top tables shone nakedly under the big windows. Julien, the *garçon*, lounged in the doorway, pulling his napkin through his hands.

Matt ordered a double cognac, and drank it in a gulp. He sat staring at the empty glass. He knew now how the mistake had been made. The clerk to whom he had handed the cheque had read the figures 290.00 francs as twenty-nine thousand francs, and, his attention distracted by the approach of the girl with the rose-buds, had forgotten to look at the wording. The second clerk, reading the cheque correctly, had verified and initialled it and passed it back again; whereupon the first clerk had paid out the amount he had first thought of — twenty-nine thousand francs.

Matt put a shaky hand in his pocket, and brought out a dirty envelope and a stub of pencil. His usually red face was pale and blotched. He made a calculation. Twenty-nine thousand francs was one thousand one hundred and sixty dollars. And it was thousands to one against the bank's knowing anything about the mistake before closing time.

Leaning his head against the wall, he shut his eyes. It was the bank's error; he had not stolen the money. He was almost sure they could do nothing. Probably they would rather lose the twenty-nine thousand francs than admit their error in a Court of Law; but even if they went to law it would be months and months before the case came on. In France the defendant in a suit can postpone the hearing for a couple of years if he knows how, and Matt knew how.

He had been in Paris for three years. Coming on a holiday trip, leaving a good job behind him, he had found the race-tracks, the baccarat clubs, the *café* life. Paris, which has captured so many, captured him, and began to suck his life out. He stayed on and on, spending his savings. The New York firm that employed him wrote to say that it could not keep his job open unless he returned at once. He did not answer the letter. There were plenty of jobs in New York, he said; he could go back when he felt like it. One day he found that he had not got his fare home. He spent a week in panic. Then he got a job in a Paris firm, lost it, got another, lost that, drifted. Nowadays he made a living during the summer months guiding tourists round the city; in the winter he did translating and typewriting or starved.



"Rose Girl, did you say?" the bank clerk murmured. "If I were a betting man I should say that here is a lucky omen."

One thousand one hundred and sixty dollars was the difference between hope and despair, happiness and misery, the stars and the gutter. He could buy clothes, go home, land with a thousand dollars in his pocket. Only a week or two ago old Dave Potter had written to say: "If you can raise eight hundred or a thousand dollars I'll let you in with me, and we'll make a fortune together."

Matt sat up and squared his shoulders; a sparkle came into his eyes. He raised his hands and pulled his worn tie straight.

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He grabbed a newspaper from the next table. He would start going home to-night! The *Aquitania* sailed to-morrow, and he could be in Cherbourg in the morning. He would get out of this cursed city on the night train, and never come back again.

He sat thinking dreamily, and what he thought of was good clothes and clean linen, of a neat, busy, decent fellow who once had been himself, of the glorious feeling of confidence that comes of having money in your pocket, of being able to look your friends in the face and know they're not expecting you to borrow ten francs or a cigarette, of going to people's houses and talking to the sort of women who wouldn't look at you if you hadn't been introduced, of being able to buy a meal without counting your money first, of having a home to live in, and possessions, and an aim in life, and things to be proud of.

He did not feel excited, but calmly blissful. Good fortune had stunned him into a delicious lethargic state. He felt that he could sit here for hours, dreaming.

Mike's Bar began filling up. Three

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Americans came in, nodded to Matt, and sat at a distant table. They sat over there because they were afraid they would have to pay for his drink if they joined him. He looked at them without anger. He would never cadge a drink again.

The clock on the wall struck twelve, and he made up his mind to go in fifteen minutes. He had a lot to do—get a meal, buy clothes, reserve a passage on the *Aquitania*, pack up.

It was strange to think he would never see Mike's Bar again. He looked round slowly, observing all the old familiar things—the Dubonnet advertisements on the wall, the volumes of the *Bottin* piled on the window-sill, the table with the cracked corner, Julien lounging in the doorway. He sighed, and felt that touch of melancholy which makes happiness complete. To leave a place, however miserable you have been in it, is always saddening, he thought. One of these Frenchmen had said something like that: "*Partir est toujours mourir un peu.*"

Henderson, an English clerk employed by one of the tourist companies, lounged over.

"Hullo, Matt!" he said. "Still set on Rose Girl?"

Matt had forgotten Rose Girl. He looked up with a start.

"Sure," he said. "She'll win all right."

"What are you going to do about it?" Henderson asked. "Do you really mean to risk all that money on her?"

Matt started laughing, and kept on till there were tears in his eyes.

"Perhaps I do," he said.

Henderson looked at him queerly, then joined the Americans at the other table.

"Matt's canned already," he confided in a whisper. "He's started morning drinking, and that's the beginning of the end. He got an extra two hundred and ninety francs yesterday—bonus from the American Tourist Company—and I'll be hanged if he isn't going to put it all on Rose Girl! The poor old devil's drunk his brains away."

At ten minutes past twelve somebody slipped into the chair next to Matt, and a hand gripped his arm. He turned slowly, and saw the brisk young man of the bank. The young man's face was pale and damp, there was a feverish light in his eyes, and his lips were trembling.

"They told me I might find you here," he said, in a quick, hoarse whisper. "Now, are you going to give it back, or shall I call the police?"

Matt regarded him tranquilly.

"Go and chase yourself," he answered.

The bank clerk looked as if he was going to faint. His lips turned white, and he caught hold of the edge of the table. Matt felt sorry for him.

"It's hard on you, my son," said Matt, "but you can't do anything. You can't prove that I had that money—you might have dropped it in a paper-basket, or given it to somebody else. And even if you could prove it I wouldn't be liable for your mistake. What's more, a bank can't afford to admit a mistake in a Court of Law."

The bank clerk said dully:—

"I'm going out to get the police."

"All right," Matt answered. "I'll call your bluff, my son."

"It is bluff," said the bank clerk with a sob. "I don't know whether you can be jailed or not, but I know what will happen to me. I ought to have told the manager, but I haven't told anybody yet. I hoped to God I'd find you, and you'd be honest enough to give the money back, so that nobody would know."

"Listen to me, my son," said Matt. "I'm a boozer, a no-gooder, a down-and-outer. Three years ago I had a good job, and money in the bank, and more than one suit. Then I came to Paris. I spent my money, lost my job, sold my clothes. At first I tried to save up the fare home, but it's four thousand francs, and that's hard to save out of an income that averages fifteen hundred a month in the summer and four hundred in the winter. I gave up, and consoled myself with drink and race-horses. A fortnight ago an old friend of mine wrote me from New York: 'I've invented a new glove-fastener,' he said, 'and I've got as many orders as I want. I'm not looking for capital, but if you can raise eight hundred or a thousand dollars I'll let you in with me and we'll make a fortune together.' Twenty-nine thousand francs is one thousand one hundred and sixty dollars."

"Listen to me," said the bank clerk. "I've got a wife and two children, and another one coming along. I earn two thousand a month at the bank. Six weeks ago my father died, and I spent all my savings clearing up his debts. To-day I've got a thousand francs in the world. If I don't pay back twenty-nine thousand francs before the bank shuts this afternoon I'll get the sack, and no bank will ever employ me again. It may be months before I get a job anywhere."

"I'm forty-eight years old," said Matt. "It's two years since I had a new suit, or a hundred francs left on the last day of the month, or was friendly with a woman. It's hard on you, my son, but you don't know what it is to be a boozer forty-eight years old and have memories of being decent once."

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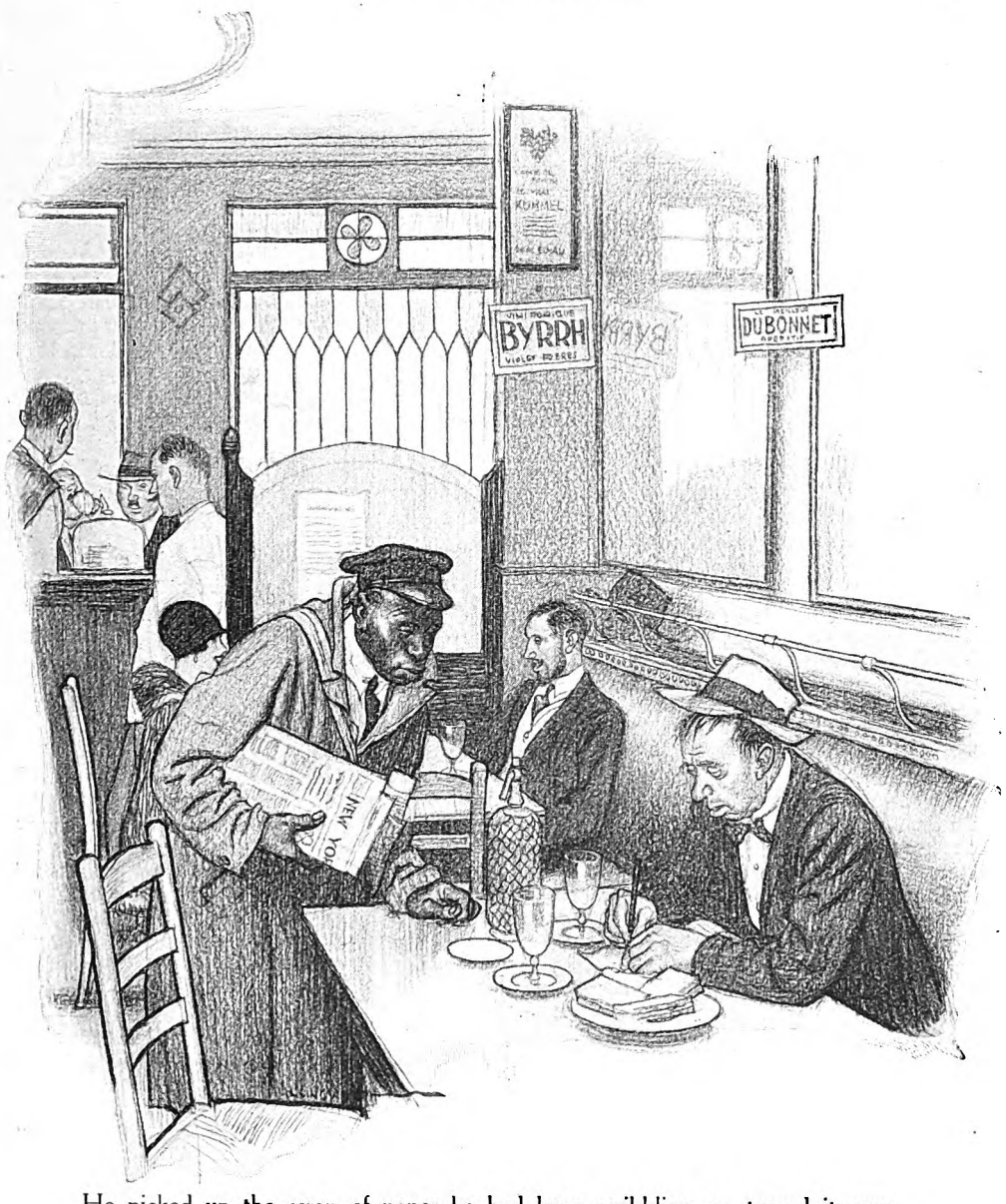

He picked up the scrap of paper he had been scribbling on, turned it over, and wrote "Rose Girl—290 to win" on the back.

"I'll shoot myself!" the clerk whispered, fiercely. "But before I do it I'll see you in the hands of the police."

"You won't do either," Matt answered. "You're young enough to get over this, and you're not the suicide type. I'm too old to save myself. It's only luck that will save me, and I'm not going to throw my luck away now I've got it. As for the police, you won't find an *agent* between here and the Boulevard, and before you could get up there I'd be in a taxi and on my way out of Paris. To-morrow I shall have left France. You know as well as I do that the bank won't have me followed. Twenty-nine thousand francs means nothing to them. I doubt if they'd do more than threaten me even if I stayed in Paris."

The clerk became maudlin. He clenched his hands and almost wept. Two or three

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people noticed him and began staring curiously.

"You don't know what it means to me," the clerk said, brokenly. "I was so happy till this morning. I'm due for a rise of salary next month, and we were going to save up to buy furniture, and get a little place of our own at the end of the year. Now I know what'll happen to me. I've been broke in Paris before, and I know how easy it is to drift and go to the devil. In a year or two I may be like you—a down-and-outer, boozing in the *cafés*."

He shivered and gulped. There was a long silence. Matt sat staring at him thoughtfully, and drummed his fingers on the table. At last he sighed.

"You win, my son," he said. "Give me my two hundred and ninety francs."

A minute later he was sitting alone. His tie was crooked again, his shoulders were hunched up. He ordered another brandy, and leant over the table, scribbling aimlessly on a scrap of paper. So this was what honesty did to you—left you to rot!

Presently Willy Brown came in. Willy Brown was the smallest and blackest American negro in Paris. He sold newspapers round the *cafés*, and took bets to bookmakers.

"You want to back anything to-day, Mr. Harvey?" he whispered.

Matt looked up blearily and nodded. After two attempts he managed to pick up the scrap of paper he had been scribbling on, turned it over, and wrote on the back "Rose Girl—290 to win." Then he fumbled in his pocket, found the notes the clerk had given him, and put notes and paper in Willy Brown's black hand.

He stayed in Mike's Bar all the afternoon. Between half-past two and five he was almost alone. On his table a pile of saucers grew, and the crust of a ham-sandwich got dry and hard in the sun.

At five minutes past three he heard the tape-machine rattling. He got up unsteadily and went over to see the result of the three o'clock race at Longchamps. Rose Girl was not in the first three.

He stumbled back to his seat, and told Julien to bring him another brandy.

AT five o'clock Willy Brown shook him by the shoulder and woke him up. Willy's eyes were so wide open that they looked like white marbles, and he could scarcely speak for excitement.

"By golly, sir, by golly!" he panted. "You sure found 'em to-day—you sure did! The ole bookmaker he 'most nearly threw a fit, but he said he didn't mind paying out 'cos he won so much on Rose Girl."

"Wha's all this?" Matt asked thickly. "Wha' you talking about?"

"Don't you know she won, sir?" Willy cried. "Don't you know she ran 'em all down the field, an' came in at five hundred to five? By golly, sir, an' you can sit there sleepin'!"

"Wha' you talking about?" Matt repeated angrily, and feebly thumped his fist on the table. "Who's won what?"

"Why, Honesty's won, sir. She raced home at five hundred to five. That's what I keep tellin' you."

Matt stared at him solemnly, and hiccupped.

"Wha's that got to do with me?"

"You backed her, sir!" cried Willy Brown, dancing from one leg to the other. "Here's the bit o' paper you give me—you writ it all over. An' here's the twenty-nine thousand francs. You won't go forgetting the poor black nigger, sir, what took the bet for you?"

Matt did not answer. He clutched the bundle of bank-notes in his hot damp hand, and stared at the scrap of paper. "Rose Girl—290 to win," he read. Then he turned the paper over. The other side—the side that Willy Brown had seen—was covered with aimless scribbling. Ten, twenty, thirty times he had written:—

"Honesty—290 francs."

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Cases from my Crime Book

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

(Interpreter at the Criminal Courts)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The stories which I have selected for this series can be found in the official records, only one or two details having been rearranged in order to avoid giving pain and reopening old wounds.

No. 17. CHUNDAH LAL AT BAY.

"YOU will be busy to-day, sir," my concierge said to me with an ingratiating smile, as I picked up my morning paper from his table on my way out. "That seems to be a queer accident in the rue de Nevers. A messenger from the Sûreté has just left this note for you. He said it was urgent. I was about to bring it upstairs when I saw you in the hall."

"Accident?" I asked. "I have heard nothing. You know more than I do." I opened the envelope. It was from M. Bertillon requesting my immediate presence. I ran into the street and hailed a passing taxi. During the short drive to the Quai des Orfèvres, I had just time to glance at the *Journal*.

"Another Motor Mystery," I saw in large headlines on the first page; but the report was vague and had evidently come in at the last minute. A private car had been found, terribly smashed, in the rue de Nevers, near our headquarters. It had collided with an electric light standard, and under the front wheels were the remains of a cycle. The driver had been shot and the interior of the car was soaked in blood. The article ended with the usual formula in such cases: "The police are investigating and several arrests are expected shortly."

I found Inspector Louys waiting for me on the stairs. "Come along," he cried. "The chief is already at the scene of the smash. He wants you to bring a camera and panoramic lenses. A lorry will remove the car when it has been photographed. The crowd is being held in check by gendarmes."

"Is it anything special, then?" I asked over my shoulder, running up to the laboratory.

"Yes," he yelled. "You'll see. I've a car waiting."

The rue de Nevers is a dirty, narrow street near the embankment, not ten minutes distant from the Sûreté. A huge crowd had, of course, collected, but the police had stretched ropes across each end, and every doorway was guarded to prevent the inmates from approaching the spot of the tragedy, which was at the corner near the river. The car had struck the iron standard with terrific force and was completely wrecked. M. Bertillon was examining the rear of the vehicle when I arrived, and one of his assistants was testing the doors for finger-prints. As soon as I had taken a

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series of photographs from various angles, a tackle was rigged and the limousine hauled up an inclined plane of planks to the police lorry, which at once drove to the spacious court of the Conciergerie. The huge gates were then shut, so that we could continue our examination without interference.

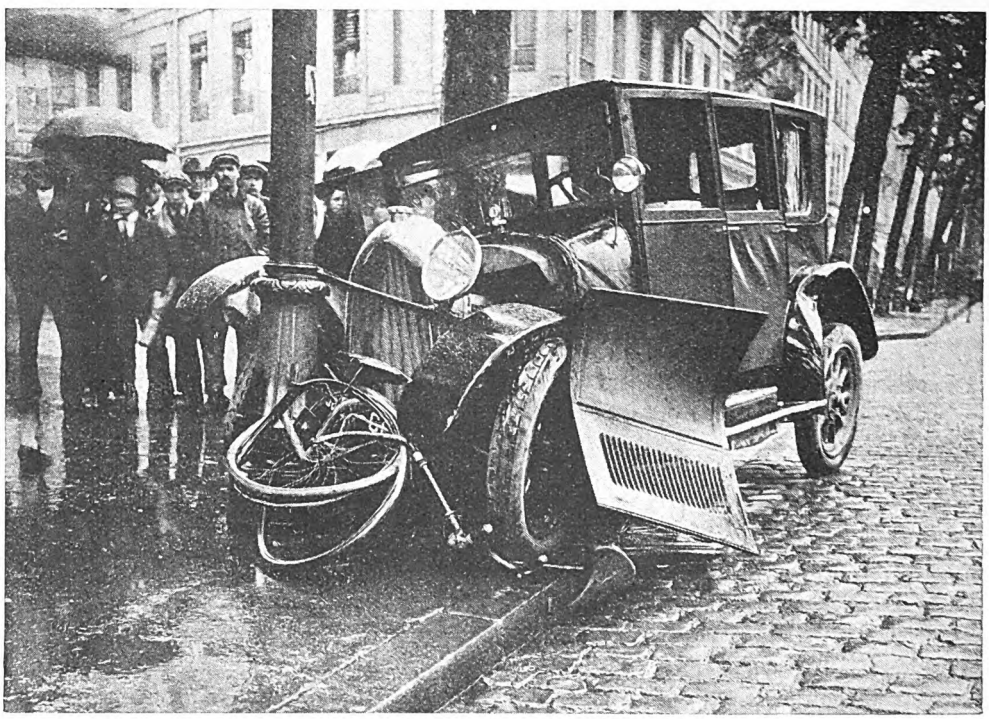
The interior, beautifully upholstered in cream satin, made it obvious that the car had belonged to a woman; but seats and floor were stained with large crimson patches

"I have rigged up a battery, monsieur," he said in his soft, emotionless voice. "You can obtain from two to twenty volts by moving a lever."

"Good," said M. Bertillon. "I've got several test-tubes with blood for you to examine."

"Microscopically?" Lebrun queried.

"No, I don't need you for that. Biologically. The driver of the car swears that the blood on the seats is his own; I don't



The smashed car in the rue de Nevers which put the Sûreté again on the trail of Chundah Lal.

and gouts of blood had coagulated on the off window.

"The driver, a man about forty, has been taken to the infirmary," Bertillon said to me. "He has a nasty scalp wound, but nothing very serious. He was found lying on the floor of the car. It's an inside drive, as you perceive. Beside him I found the most curious object I have ever seen. Come up to the laboratory with me; I am going to examine it. I'll wager I shall surprise you."

THE HYPNOTIC GLASSES.

THERE was such a note of suppressed excitement in my chief's manner that my nerves tingled in anticipation. Lebrun met us at the door with a mysterious smile.

believe it. That wound on his head never bled enough to leave all those stains. I want you to apply our new coagulation test. We may be lucky. The surgeon from the infirmary will send you some of the driver's blood. It will be the first chance we've had to try our new method," Bertillon added, turning to me. I knew to what he was referring. Quite recently we had discovered that the blood of certain human beings reacted in a peculiar manner when mixed with that of others. The injected blood caused it to clot in parts. So violent was this phenomenon in some cases that, before transfusion was resorted to in hospitals, a test was made to ascertain whether the blood to be given was not antagonistic to the patient's. Nevertheless, it was one chance in a thousand that this discovery

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needed only the current of a pocket lamp. It was silvered, except for two minute pinholes which directed the light obliquely into the pupil of each eye in such fashion that the entire eye shone as with an inward flame. We were still absorbed by our discovery when there came a loud pounding on the door, which I had locked.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" we heard Rousseau shouting, excitedly. "Quick! A most amazing discovery!"

I slipped back the bolt, and Inspector Rousseau came stumbling in. With a dramatic gesture he opened a bundle he was carrying and scattered a heap of coins, gold ornaments, and flashing jewels among the retorts and crucibles on the table.

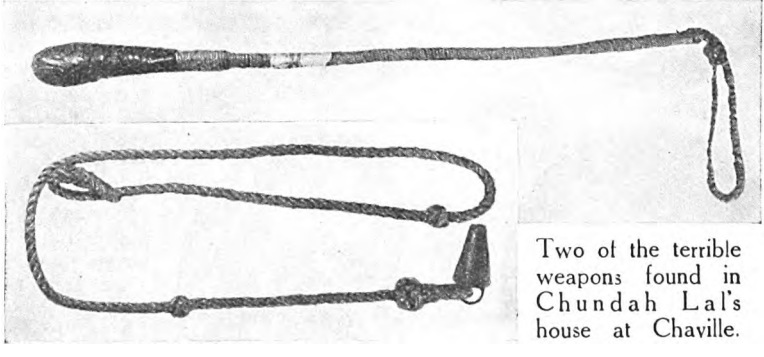
"A dummy petrol tank," he gasped, "and it's full of loot!"

"What?" Bertillon yelled, "and you smashed it?"

"No, no, sir. One end unscrews. I've taken care to disturb nothing, and any finger-marks on it are still intact."

For a time Bertillon walked up and down in deep thought.

"Thank Heaven. We have picked up the trail of this society of the 'Happy Death' again," he said at last. "I was beginning to despair. Since that night Etienne Lafontaine came back, and I called off the police, in order to make it possible to trace the poor fellows who have been scattered about the world, deprived of their memory, and lost to their relatives, this devilish Hindu and his band have vanished as by magic. I feel sure they have not left France, for every road, railway, and harbour is watched day and night. But France is a big country. Thanks to this car and the driver, we are in touch again. I imagine Chundah Lal was trying to get away with his valuables when something happened. Go and help Lebrun," he said to me. "Rousseau and I will continue our examination of the car."



Two of the terrible weapons found in Chundah Lal's house at Chaville.

THE BLOOD TESTS.

EVERYTHING on that morning appeared to be working in our favour. Lebrun had succeeded in liquefying some of the blood and had just received a tube from the infirmary.

"You have come opportunely," he exclaimed when I entered. "Bare your left arm. I prefer to tap *your* veins; you have more blood to spare than I have."

I watched him manipulate his instruments with little hope of a happy result, but hardly had he added some of the blood taken from my arm to that of the wounded driver when he sprang up with a cry of delight.

"The reaction. Dr. Kleinmann's reaction. The chauffeur's blood clots. Look! And that taken from the car doesn't. Someone else was wounded besides the driver."

The Kleinmann reaction was so distinct that I immediately carried a report to my chief, who was still in the courtyard of the Conciergerie with Rousseau and Louys.

"The lucky series," he said with a satisfied smile. "We shall succeed now; I feel sure of it. Come along; I've finished here. Do you know who the man is who was found in the car? Dauvergne, the racing driver, who killed his sweetheart five years ago and escaped from the gendarmes whilst being transferred to La Rochelle. He disappeared in the most extraordinary manner. Chundah Lal again. Here is Dauvergne's police chart. But for the anthropometrical measurements and finger-prints, I should never have known him. It now remains to be seen whether he remembers who he is."

A surgeon was bandaging the man's wound when we arrived at the infirmary. Dufresne had joined us, and with the doctor's consent at once began his questions.

"Well, Charles Dauvergne, so you have decided to come back to us? Whom did you murder this time? You know you have still five years to serve for killing your sweetheart, Mlle. Lilliane?"

The man looked at Dufresne with dilated eyes.

"My name is not Dauvergne. I am Jules Poisson, and I was alone in the car. I've not killed anybody."

For a moment the Sûreté Chief stared at

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Detectives searching the paths near Chaville after the adventures in the "haunted" house.
Inspector Dufresne is marked with a cross.

the fellow suspiciously, then without a word he placed the picture of a handsome girl—the unfortunate Lilliane—on the bed. The man started visibly and his face twitched. For a long time he gazed in silence at the photograph. Suddenly the blood suffused his face and as quickly receded, leaving him pale as death. His hands began to tremble, and as we watched his expression changed as though another personality were creeping furtively into a body to which it had long been a stranger. Tears started from his eyes and abruptly, with a wild cry, he covered his face and began to sob. Dufresne gave him time to recover from his emotion, and then, in a kindly voice, urged him to tell the truth.

DAUVERGNE'S STORY.

SO, little by little, in disjointed sentences, broken again and again by choking sobs, he related his story. It was in all respects similar to that of Lafontaine. Pursued by the police and obsessed by the desire to forget, he had met the Hindu in a *café* in Paris where only criminals foregathered. Chundah Lal had promised him immunity from the police and a fresh start, with the haunting thought of the crime he had committed wiped from his memory. In return, Dauvergne had given the Oriental a large sum of money and all his jewellery.

Since then, although a dim, aching overlapping of his former life had often caused him to spend weary hours trying to understand what had happened, he had accepted the name of Poisson as his own and believed the Hindu's story that he had been very ill. He had remained in Chundah Lal's household as under-secretary, grateful for the post; and, while there, had seen many men come and go, but what had become of them and what took place at the gatherings of the ringleaders he did not know. From the first he had been forbidden to enter the private rooms of the Hindu, which were always guarded by native servants.

Then, a month previously, there had come a fearful rumpus and panic, and they had fled in the night to a house in Chaville, some distance from Versailles. For several weeks he had been kept a prisoner in a cellar. Finally, the man who had brought him food and drink every day ceased to come; and when, driven by hunger, he had broken down the door, he discovered the house to be deserted. Fortunately there was a car in the garage, and he had taken this and driven away, intending to sell it and leave the country. He had thought the car to be empty, but to his horror, when near the embankment, a cyclist ranged alongside and pointed a pistol at him, ordering him to stop. At the same moment Chundah Lal suddenly appeared behind him and seized him by the throat.

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Terrified and hardly knowing what he did, he had swerved and smashed into the cyclist, but in doing so the car had struck the standard. At the instant of the smash Chundah Lal fired at him, the bullet ploughing a furrow in his scalp. A terrible fight had ensued, during which he had stabbed his assailant, and, as he believed, killed him. But when, terrified at what he had done, he tried to open the door of the car, he had fallen to the floor in a swoon. He had obviously feared he would be charged with murder, and when he learned that neither of the men had been found by the police, he related that the blood was from his own wound, which had been caused by the smash.

Since we knew all about the Euthanasia, however, he divined that the truth would serve him best. What had become of the Indian and the cyclist, he could not say; he remembered nothing until he came to his senses in the infirmary. Dufresne looked at Bertillon with a sceptical smile, but my chief's face was set and grim.

"Queer as it sounds," he said, "I believe every word of his story. These people have fled from town to town, back and forth, like rats in a trap. At every frontier our men have prevented them from escaping, and they are desperate. Did you know the car had a dummy tank?" he asked Dauvergne.

The man shook his head. "No. I saw there were two, but I thought the second was a reserve tank for long distances."

BERTILLON MOVES.

BERTILLON drew us aside. "If we were dealing with ordinary criminals, I'd suggest putting the car in a garage as a trap, in the hope that they'd come to get the hidden money, but this Hindu knows well we shall find the loot. It's evident he had intended to use the car in his flight and the escape of Dauvergne upset his scheme. The box under the back seats is pierced for air and Chundah Lal was probably hidden inside. Our best course is to search the house at Chaville, but it must be done secretly. It is our only hope of capturing these men. You had better go there to-night with Rousseau and Louys"—Bertillon added, turning to me—"the three of you, well armed, should be enough. I'll have men hidden in the woods behind, within sound of your whistle, and all the roads shall be guarded."

Meanwhile, Dufresne had given orders to the surgeon to place a man on watch near the patient.

"We are taking no risks," he said to Dauvergne. "They may try to reach you even here. If you help us in this matter, we may be able to obtain a fresh trial for you. Facts have come to light since you disappeared of which I shall tell you later, but I'll say this now, it is quite possible you only wounded your sweetheart. Let that cheer you, and try to remember all that occurred day by day whilst you were at Versailles."

Once outside, Rousseau beckoned to Louys and myself.

"I shall take a couple of pistols," he said, "and you had better do the same. Also electric torches and dark clothes. This is not going to be a picnic to-night. We meet at seven at the Montparnasse station. It's a long walk from there, but a less obvious way in case anyone is watching."

The appearance of the house at Chaville was not pleasant. Perched on the hillside above the railway cutting, the building, a large gable-roofed country mansion, stood half hidden behind huge pines and tangled shrubbery. Inquiries elicited the fact that no one had lived there for twenty years, and the state of the grounds abundantly confirmed this. A high wall ran around the rear of the garden, which encroached upon the dark forest, and in front stout iron railings and a huge gate loomed dimly through tangled creeper and ivy. Rousseau pointed to a spreading oak. One of the branches just touched the top of the wall.

"That's our way in, but softly. I've brought a rope. We'll leave it dangling from the branch as a quick way out."

THE GARDEN'S TERRIBLE KEEPERS.

BY means of the rope we were able to drop to the grass without noise. The place appeared to be absolutely deserted, and a dank foul odour of decay caused me to shiver with disgust. Bending low and creeping from bush to bush, we approached slowly, feeling our way in the gloom. Now and then, for a second, Louys, who was in front, flashed the rays of his torch at the ground, searching for pitfalls. Suddenly, as we were about to mount the three broken steps leading to the door, he uttered a shrill cry and swept his arm violently back, nearly hurling me from my feet.

"My God—look!" he cried. The light from his torch swept along the ground, and we saw a long brown, sinuous body slip into the undergrowth. There was no mistaking the characteristic markings on the back of the reptile, although I had only caught a fleeting glimpse.

"A cobra," I gasped, "here in Paris. That's worse than anything I expected. Keep your torch alight, Louys. There may be more of the beasts in the house."

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key into the rusty lock and thrust back the door. As he did so, a loud groan and a rattling as of chains sounded from somewhere underground. Pistols ready, and with torches exploring every nook and corner, we advanced along the main passage. Dust lay thickly everywhere—too thickly—for Louys pointed out where it had been strewn over recent footprints.

"Faked—all faked——" he was beginning, when a queer grunting and groaning again startled us, but this time it came from somewhere in front. A moment later a vague dim luminosity caught my attention. It was a green phosphorescence that appeared to hover a yard or so from the floor, just inside a room, the door of which was ajar.

WE MEET DEATH'S IMAGE.

I AT once extinguished my lamp and my companions did likewise. Slowly the light became stronger, and the sharp outline of a monstrous face appeared. It was a vision such as only the diseased imagination of a madman could conceive. Pallid, almost shapeless, with gaping holes where the eyes and mouth should have been —yet it moved—it was alive. Gradually under it a body materialized—a framework of bones and fluttering rags, until the horrid image of death stood there before us, one arm raised menacingly. My scalp tingled with horror. Louys had grasped my arm and his fingers felt like steel.

Now the apparition appeared to melt. It fluctuated and swirled in a luminous mist, which again steadied and solidified, until a huge ape emerged in the place of the skeleton. It was too much. Raising my pistol, I fired shot upon shot. A deafening splintering crash succeeded the detonations, and from outside came the thin shouts of the detectives posted in the woods. For a minute we lost our heads and ran in panic to the door. Then, remembering our duty, we again faced the haunted room.

Our comrades now came running to our assistance and several magnesium flares illumined the scene. My shots had smashed a large sheet of plate glass, of which jagged fragments were still standing. On one side lay a broken skeleton, and behind the splintered glass was a huge stuffed gorilla. We were still examining this when Louys, who had been running from room to room, came back dragging a man whose face was covered by a white cowl. I was about to tear it away, when Louys cried:

"Don't touch the head. The man is a leper. His face is awful, but I know him; it's Lastolle, the jeweller who disappeared some time ago. He was manipulating several switches when I caught him. There is a large accumulator plant below, and we can now have all the light we want. I've turned on the current."

When the dusty lamps flooded the house with their welcome rays, I saw that we had been the victims of an ingenious trick. By throwing the current into a series of small green bulbs, the skeleton we had found was reflected in the sheet of glass, placed at an angle of forty-five degrees across the room; this acted as a mirror. Behind the image of death, unseen in the dark, was the stuffed ape. When this was illuminated by another hidden row of lamps and the first slowly turned out, the ape became visible through the skeleton.

"Clever," Rousseau said shamefacedly. "What fools we were to be scared by such a trick! But the effect was certainly weird."

Caroline Dobbritsch when arrested as a young girl in Warsaw.

The reaction from our fright produced an overwhelming feeling of anger. We set to work at once in a kind of frenzy to search the house, and we found ample evidence of the activities of the Euthanasia. Best of all, hidden behind a painting was a record of those whom the evil creature, Chundah Lal, had robbed of their personality within the last year. The woman we knew as Dolores d'Annecy was in reality Caroline Dobbritsch, a Polish actress, who when but a young girl had been implicated in a revolutionary plot. A photograph taken at the time was discovered among some half-burnt papers. Whether she had also fallen under the spell of the Hindu or was his willing decoy we could not tell.

Bertillon laughed loudly when I related our scare, but at the sight of the half-witted creature, Lastolle, who had but lately been a strong, healthy man, his brows set in a hard line which boded ill for the men we sought.

"Lafontaine, who recovered his memory

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and put us unwittingly on their track, was lucky," he said, grimly. "I see by this list that most of the others have sunk to the lowest level. Perhaps Chundah Lal intended to use them some day for criminal enterprises. Go along to the *Halles* and that evil place called 'La Grappe d'Or.'

change. Among the twenty creatures thus collected we found eight of our men, besides the two Americans whom Bannister was seeking. The doctor who attended them shook his head doubtfully when my friend asked if they would recover their memories.

"I cannot tell," he said. "Something

Eight victims of Chundah Lal. All had once been wealthy and well-known men. Their case was hopeless and they died practically insane.

Better bring back everyone you find in a police van and we'll sort them out."

"And what about the devil responsible for all this?" I asked.

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders. "We'll get him, but it will take time. If only he sticks to the woman, it will help us. You know my views. Women are the weak spot in every criminal's armour."

WE ROUND UP CHUNDAH LAL'S VICTIMS.

AFTER a much-needed rest, we spent the next night scouring the low haunts near the *Halles*, those vast markets where the food Paris consumes daily is collected. Soon our van began to fill with ragged and foul creatures. It was hard to believe that any of them could ever have been the well-dressed men—bankers, manufacturers, and dandies—whose photographs I had with me. At last, towards dawn, we entered the dreadful place called "The Golden Grape." The stench was nauseating, and by the dim light of an oil lamp I saw a number of wretches sitting on a long, narrow bench. Before them was a taut, greasy rope stretched level with their shoulders. On this rested their arms, their heads pillowed on folded hands. And so these human derelicts slept. Even the cells in which we locked them must have come as a pleasant

inhuman has been done to them. It is not merely hypnotism. They have been subjected to a terrible poison, and there are traces of half-healed wounds on their heads. Only time will show."

When we returned to headquarters, Bertillon was restlessly pacing his room, dressed in a long ulster and travelling cap.

"At last!" he cried, impatiently. "We must start at once. Chundah Lal is hiding somewhere near Grenoble. The woman has been seen driving through the town. I have commandeered a special train to take us there."

Bannister accompanied us, and during the long trip we had ample leisure to discuss the strange events of the last few days. Only Bertillon remained aloof and silent. I could see that his brain was at work on the queer case and his thoughts flew ever in advance of the rushing, roaring train. Never since I first became his assistant had I seen him so eager to capture a criminal. As a rule, his interest ceased when the investigation had solved the puzzle; but I remembered the dreadful company of lost souls we had collected, and my heart beat in sympathy with my chief. A murderous *apache* was a kindly being compared with this Oriental.

Two detectives with a powerful car met us at the station. The Hindu and the woman had been tracked to a house in the moun-

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tains. There they cowered at bay, alone except for one servant, who also drove the car in which they had been seen several times exploring the roads. On each occasion patrolling gendarmes had caused them to return hurriedly to their retreat.

"There is only one road," the local *commissaire* informed us; "and I have placed guards on each side of the mountain. They can only try to escape towards Chambéry or take the narrow track which leads to Briançon. There is a precipice, five hundred feet deep, on one side and an unscalable cliff on the other. Since you ordered me to wait, we have not molested them. But they cannot get away."

"Then let us start immediately; I am anxious to see them safely locked in a cell," Bertillon cried, eagerly.

"But it is dark, monsieur. It would be most hazardous. You must wait till daylight."

"No, no. We'll go at once. During the night they may escape on foot into the forests. I cannot risk it."

The crack driver of the police was set at the wheel, and with a Bleriot searchlight throwing a dazzling beam to light our way, we crept slowly up the narrow winding path.

THE HUNT IS UP.

"THERE, look! That white building among the trees at the top," the *commissaire* exclaimed. "That's their house. Ah — they've seen our lights—listen."

Above the grinding of our own low gear, the staccato bellow and roar of an open exhaust came to our ears and a circle of light flickered through the trees.

"Accelerate—force her!" Bertillon yelled to our driver. Hardly had the words left his lips when the ground heaved and the dull roar of an explosion swept down on us. A huge pillar of flames rose from the summit of the mountain and an inverted cone of stones and dust rushed upwards from the spot where the house had been a moment before. At the same instant a frightful jar caused our car to skid and smash against the rocks flanking the path, whilst a shower of stones and stunted firs rolled into the gulf below.

"Good God! He's mined the path," the driver yelled. We hastily scrambled to the jagged breach and gazed in dismay at the havoc wrought by the blast. Bertillon stood with both hands pressed against his temples, groaning in despair.

"Beaten—damn them; beaten!" he muttered over and over again.

"If you can all climb across, monsieur," the driver said quietly, pulling my chief by the sleeve, "I will try to jump the gap—it's only about a yard. I can rush the empty car at it."

We all stared at the plucky fellow in admiration.

"Sure," Bannister cried. "You've a nerve, but it's a cinch if you can get up speed. Come on; we'll climb across above the road."

Fascinated—as men assisting at a superb battle of gladiators—we lay above the broken road and watched the huge car slide back with silent engine. Then—roaring like a thing alive—it rushed towards the leap. In his excitement the chauffeur was gripping the contact of the siren on the wheel, and the coughing yell of the Klaxon added its monstrous din to the rumbling and clashing of falling rocks, as with crash and shriek of straining metal the front of the car struck the path again. There were but a couple of inches to spare, and the hind

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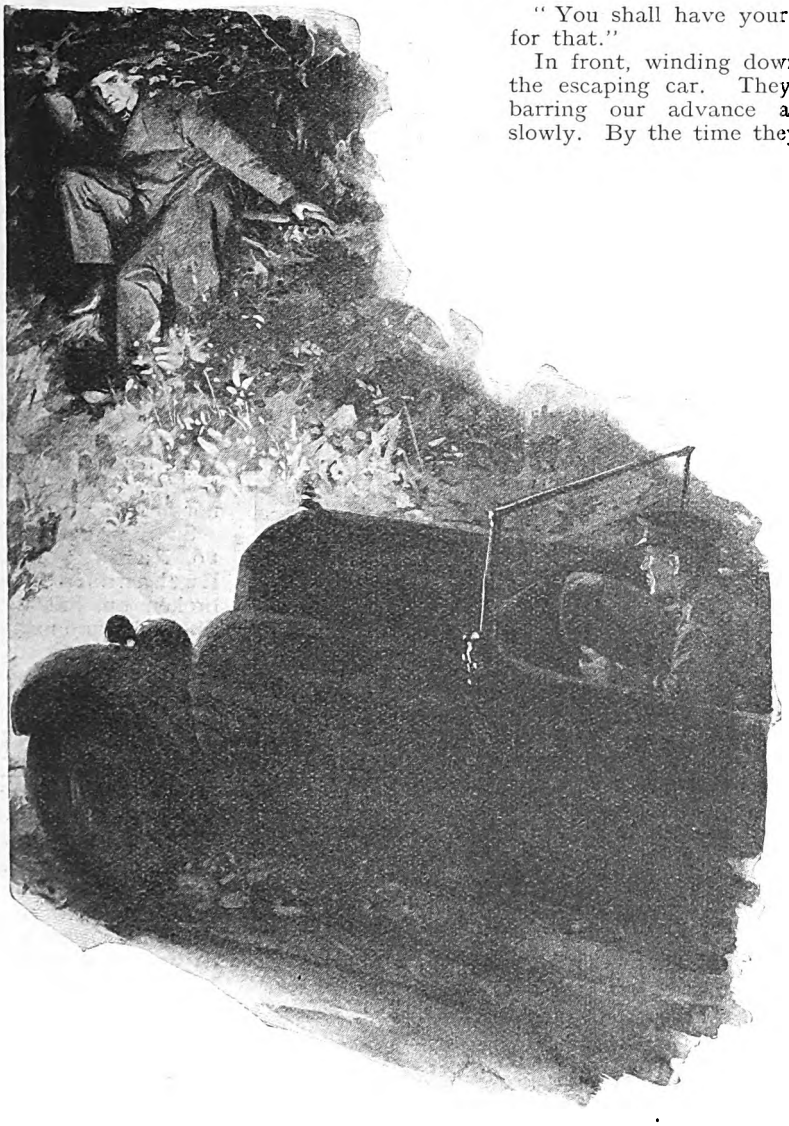

Roaring like a thing alive, it rushed towards the leap.

wheels rotated frenziedly seeking to grip the crumbling earth.

Fear contracted my muscles and set my nerves twitching. My heart sucked at the blood in my veins, leaving me without volition, and the nausea of terror caused my throat to close and my breath to come in gasps. Then I saw that the wheels held, and I yelled in triumph. A moment later we tumbled in once more and roared away on the down grade. Bannister thumped the driver on the back delightedly, and the *commissaire*, his face the colour of clay, shouted :—

" You shall have your sergeant's stripes for that."

In front, winding down the incline, was the escaping car. They had counted on barring our advance and were driving slowly. By the time they realized that we had passed we had already crept within pistol-shot. Bannister drew his automatic, but Bertillon seized his arm.

" Only as a last resort," he said. " I want them alive."

The Hindu's car was a huge Delage. Now began a race, the strangest I had ever beheld. Although at times a mile separated us, the windings of the road were such that we could look down into the flying, swaying vehicle below. In it, besides the driver, were two people : a man dressed in flowing robes and turban, and a woman. They were so near, though still distant because of the twisting path, that the temptation to leap the interval was almost irresistible.

Abruptly, without warning, we were thrown violently forward and fell in a heap on the floor. The driver had coolly taken a short cut across jagged rocks and fallen branches, gaining so much by this move that now only a hundred yards separated us from our quarry. Instantly shots cracked and bullets whistled overhead. Bending low, our man held straight on.

" Shoot at the tyres ! " Bertillon cried. But accurate aim was impossible, for our terrific speed and the constant short curves hurled us from side to side.

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THE DRIVE TO DESTRUCTION.

THE fleeing couple had now realized that their capture was imminent. A wild triumphant yell suddenly pealed from the man with the turban. We saw him raise his hand and strike at the driver. Then, as the man fell sideways, he seized the wheel and rushed straight at the gaping precipice. For a dreadful instant—an eternity it seemed to our paralyzed nerves—the car hung on the edge, then a fearful crashing, rending, smashing came to our ears as they disappeared into the gulf. For long minutes we stood, gazing down into the gloom. The police crossed themselves and muttered in awestruck whispers.

"Dawn is not far away," Bertillon murmured with trembling voice. "We'll wait and identify them. But they've paid their debt. The chasm is nearly half a mile deep. B-r-r-r . . . what a leap!"

We settled down in our car, each busy with his thoughts, until the first rays of the sun coloured the snows above us. It was a difficult climb into the canyon. Fragments of the car had caught on projecting rocks, and half-way down we came on the mangled body of Caroline Dobbritsch, *alias* Mme. d'Annecy. She must have died instantly, but her face was twisted with horror. The two Orientals were lying on their faces. One was the man we had seen when we called on Chundah Lal disguised as clerics. Bertillon stooped towards the other, but hardly had he lifted the head when he started back with a yell of surprise.

"Tricked again—by Heaven! It is not Chundah Lal, but the secretary disguised with a wig and beard. The arch-fiend has got away."

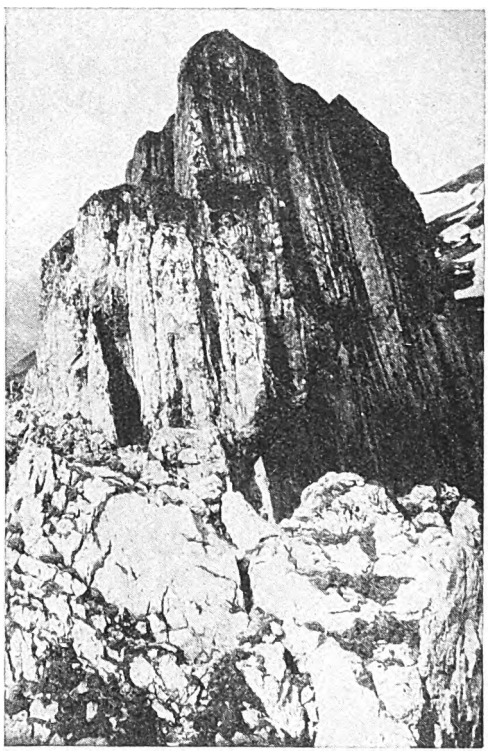
Turning on the *commissaire* with an angry snarl, he barked:—

"Your men, where are they? I thought they guarded the roads?"

"They are lower down at the narrowest bend. No one could have passed them."

"Then the Hindu never came here. We have been fooled. We shall not find him now."

Sadly we returned to Paris. The Euthanasia was broken up, but the ringleader and many of his men were still free. The two Americans recovered and returned to New York with Bannister, but the others, among whom were Cottin and Codorin, the taxi-driver, suffered constantly from delusions, and in a short time paranoia developed and it became necessary to intern them in the asylum at Charenton. The money and jewellery found in the dummy tank were never identified.



Part of the precipice down which the detectives had to clamber to find the remains of the car and the three criminals.

In return for his information and because the evidence discovered in the house at Versailles made his guilt doubtful, Dauvergne was pardoned.

"I shall not rest until I find Chundah Lal," Bertillon said to me. "Classify all the charts and exhibits, and put them on my 'unsolved problems' shelf. The Sûreté has been warned and will not relax its vigilance."

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Does Efficiency Pay?

By

F. E. BAILY

Illustrated by
BERTRAM PRANCE

I.

THE caddie ceased dancing from sheer exhaustion. High in the sky a lark tactfully forbore to sing. All around Nature paid mute homage to the incredible feat, an eclipse of the sun being impossible to arrange at such short notice.

James Overway stood solidly planted on the green, his stern, grave countenance (for he came of the stern, grave school of golfers) impassive, trying to feel all that he knew a man ought to feel who has just done the seventh hole in one. Frankly, the effort failed. His immortal soul, like the soles of his shoes, seemed to be made of crêpe rubber. Some things stun a fellow.

Herbert Whinney, his opponent, sought madly for the *mot juste*. Then a happy smile spread all over his face and down his pull-over to the hem of his plus-fours. The brain had worked.

"Your hole, I believe, James," he said.

"Well, after all," James answered, modest like all heroes, "one plays the tee shot down hill, and if the ball pitches on the green near the pin it's very likely to roll down. After all, it's a short hole."

"Never before in the history of the club——" Herbert Whinney began, more to himself than to anyone else. "I don't know—I think I shall stand myself a new putter. I'm dead off my putting, and one must celebrate somehow."

Reverently the caddie handed James the ball, now unique among golf balls. James placed it in his pocket, deciding to have it suitably mounted and present it to the club. They went on to the eighth tee, and while Herbert Whinney proceeded to give a display of erratic brilliance from sheer emotion, James played his usual stern, grave game, befitting a chartered accountant, and won comfortably, as always, from Herbert Whinney. On the last green he shook hands with the caddie, tipped the lad a pound, and accompanied his friend in the direction of the club lounge.

As ever, the lounge of the Morton Prendiville Golf Club provided, just before the luncheon hour, a cheering vista of arm-chairs, gaily-patterned woollen goods, and tweed suitings of strange device. Prominent among the law-givers and prophets sat Colonel Gates, the secretary, and Durgan Boley, the well-known writer on golf.

"Taking it all round," the Colonel was saying, "taking it all round, I consider Ted Ray——"

But Herbert Whinney, an eighteen handicap man, broke in upon him without apology, for to every hound his moment. The pull-over of Herbert Whinney swelled to bursting point with pride.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "Overway has just done the seventh hole in one."

Amid dead silence Colonel Gates rose and held out a sturdy hand.

"On behalf of the club," he began, "congratters, old boy. Hefty bit of work, by Gad! They'll have something to say in the papers about this. Odds against it must be a million to one. Occasion of a lifetime. What are you going to drink?"

"No, no," answered James Overway, firmly. "This is mine." He glanced about the well-filled lounge and his trained financial brain totalled instantly the net cost of thirty-five beverages at, say, one-and-sixpence per head. "Gentlemen, you are taking this one with me, please."

James Overway, seated in the midst, gazed round at a mass of eager faces glowing with the hue of open-air modified by gin and bitters, at seventy ears eager for the story of this modern miracle.

"Well," he began, "as you know, the seventh hole is an iron shot, bogey being three——"

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II.

IN all that rapt audience none listened more carefully than Durgan Boley. A stout little man, bland of countenance and ripe of judgment, he had made a life-long study of the great game, relying on the resultant knowledge to fill his manger sumptuously three times a day and clothe his body in homespun and fine knitwear. Truly his golf was sensational, yet his pen proved mightier than the niblick.

Many sound judges considered his description in the *Daily Clarion*, *Rural Topics*, and other organs of the last International Championship to eclipse anything Macaulay or Joseph Hergesheimer ever wrote. His grasp of his subject was encyclopædic. He knew what Joyce Wethered had for breakfast on the days when she won the Ladies' Championship, and the colour of Bobby Jones's bedroom carpet. Most startling of all, Dugald Inverary, the rudest professional in Scotland, was invariably civil to him.

Not only did Durgan Boley serve up the story of James Overway's achievement as a tasty news item in the daily press, but he also prepared a serious technical paper for *The Golfer* on "Men Who Have Holed Out in One," from the almost mythical Angus McFarlane in 1824 to the present day, drawing interesting conclusions from the ratio of the whiskered famous to those who were clean-shaven. In "Tee-Time Topics," that masterly series of golfing notes which he contributes on Saturdays to the *Daily Clarion*, he wrote thus of James Overway :—

"A tall, pleasant-faced man in the early forties, Overway was educated at Harton, and on leaving qualified as a chartered accountant and joined the family firm of Field, Tipman, and Overway, in which he is now senior partner. He believes firmly in the overlapping grip and prefers flannel trousers to plus-fours. Oddly enough, he has used the same driver ever since his début as a golfer ten or twelve years ago. He is neither a teetotaller nor a non-smoker. . . ."

During the ensuing week, James Overway received several cases of whisky and a dozen boxes of cigars with the compliments and congratulations of the proprietors, an assortment of flannel trousers from admiring manufacturers, many pairs of plus-fours from tailors wishing to wean him from flannel trousers, a vast quantity of drivers from sports goods dealers who felt sure it was time he had a new one, and one thousand nine hundred and sixty-three letters from total strangers, one hundred and seventy-two of which contained proposals of marriage.

The writers of these last reckoned without Gloria Prendiville.

There have been Prendivilles at Morton Prendiville since the Norman Conquest. Gloria's father, Sir Jasper Prendiville, not only mastered the local foxhounds, but represented the constituency in Parliament. He had often been heard to say that he would rather hang a poacher than a murderer any day of the week, and regretted that, as a Justice of the Peace, his powers did not permit him to put his principles into practice ; a stout, red-faced, angry sort of man, given to bellowing on very slight provocation.

It was typical of James Overway that, being senior partner in a good sound business, he should become engaged to a good sound girl, the kind that wears wool next her skin and ne'er casts a clout till May be out. He first became attracted to her at the bridge table. He felt that a girl who could partner him time after time without ever jarring on his most sensitive feelings had the makings of an excellent wife. Their love remained, as has been said of the River Thames :—

"Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full."

THE one crumpled roseleaf in James's bed of happiness consisted in the fact that Gloria was no golfer. The Prendivilles have been killing things for generations, and golf seldom entails the taking of life beyond that of an odd worm slain by a green keeper. From the first he hardly considered she would realize that he had become a national figure.

The subject first cropped up after a day's beagling. The beagles, crook-kneed and dewlapped like Thessalian bulls, had run like anything after a hare, and Gloria and James had run like anything after the beagles, and then proceeded, covered with mud and self-respect, to Prendiville Manor for tea.

"Father asked me," began Gloria, eating a muffin in her capable way, "to tell you he wants you to support him on the platform at the political meeting in the village hall next Thursday. He's making rather a big speech on the land question."

James's face fell.

"I'm awfully sorry, but they've booked me to broadcast that night. Otherwise I'd have loved to."

"Broadcast ? But what have you got to broadcast about ? " inquired Gloria with a *fiancée's* shy candour.

"Well, you know, I happened to do the seventh hole in one."

"Ah, yes." Her tone implied she felt

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"Your hole, I believe, James," he said.

as anxious as anyone to let bygones be bygones. "Still, I don't quite see——"

"The seventh hole is an iron shot, bogey being three. I pitched on the green about a foot from the pin——"

"A game, James, is a game, and I know

one or two perfectly nice people who play golf, but is all this notoriety quite necessary?"

"It is a record for the club, dear."

Gloria smiled the patient smile of a martyr in the arena inexplicably ignored by the lions.

"Well, at any rate, I hope you can take me to the Rectory next Tuesday evening. The Bishop is staying there for the night, and the Rector and Mrs. Bool want him to meet people who really matter in the neighbourhood. After our marriage you, naturally, will be entering more into public life as my husband, and I do feel——"

James Overway hung his head in shame.

"I'm awfully sorry, Gloria, but on Tuesday the Golf Club is giving me a complimentary dinner. I'm presenting the club with the ball I did the seventh hole in one with, suitably mounted, and the oldest member is unveiling a commemorative

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tablet in the hall. If it were any other night——"

"It's a pity, but I know Mrs. Bool will quite understand. I'm sure the golf ball will look very nice mounted. They do get these things up so well nowadays."

And as James Overway grovelled out of the room and sneaked down the drive, he knew himself to be wrought out of that inner essence of mud which even children will not play with, as far as Gloria was concerned.

III.

IN his room at the Lombard Street office of Field, Tipman, and Overway, old Henry Tipman signed a cheque with trembling fingers, laid aside his quill pen, dusted a little sand over the signature, and leaned back contentedly. With his tall stick-up collar, stock, double-breasted frock-coat, and strapped trousers he barely looked his ninety-one years. Ebenezer Cray, his confidential clerk, a venerable figure in the seventies, bent his grey head obsequiously to remove the cheque-book.

"Eh? eh?" wheezed Henry Tipman; "what's all this I hear of young James's little boy doing the seventh hole in one, Ebenezer? Must be a better lad than his father." It remained a matter of scorn to Henry Tipman that James Overway Senior had retired from business at the trivial age of eighty-five. "You ought to take to this new-fangled game of golf yourself, Ebenezer. You look pasty for a youngster in the prime of life. Nothing like sport to keep a man young. Many a time in the 'fifties I've put on the gloves with Battling Alfred of Hoxton. Eh? eh?"

"I must express my respectful gratitude for the advice, Mr. Henry, sir," quavered Ebenezer Cray. "I will endeavour to give it effect, sir, believe me," and tottered humbly from the presence.

Nevertheless, Henry Tipman did but voice the general opinion in City circles. Stout, bluff company promoters and burly managing directors like nothing better than to have their books audited by a firm whose senior partner can hit them clean down the fairway, and tackle a bunker and a balance-sheet with equal confidence. Therefore not only in many a bucket-shop was the fame of James Overway, who did the seventh at Morton Prendiville in one, vaunted, but two large banks and three insurance companies transferred their business to Field, Tipman, and Overway, because they considered James an object-lesson to their staffs.

As Sir Grierson Potts, chairman of the United Provident, said to his chief actuary: "I can't stand being audited by Gould and Tompkins any longer. Gould foozled his drive off the first tee when he was my guest at Pleasant Hill last week-end, and Tompkins's short game positively stinks. Their contract expires this quarter, and it's a very good opportunity to make a change."

Although this new respect and consideration on the part of his business associates and fellow-men did not go to James Overway's head, it gave him a genial sense of self-assurance, especially when he received a request to serve on the committee of the Golf Club. Nor were these manifestations confined merely to his equals. In the City chop-house where he lunched, George, his favourite waiter, who is said, as a scullery boy, to have washed up the plate used by Charles Dickens, now handed him the pickled walnuts with added deference, and he detected a strange new willingness among junior members of his staff.

Curiously enough, the many public tributes showered upon the man of her choice brought no added zip to Gloria Prendiville. It may have been due to some slight imperfection in the functioning of her endocrine glands, but she could not see why the illustrated Press repeatedly published his photograph in preference to hers. It was a standing grievance with Gloria that her face never adorned the society papers. On the other hand, the Lady Miriam and the Lady Rachel Harrup figured in them every week. Their father, the respected Earl of Cricklewood, who, as Mr. Meyerstein, came forward in the Great War and coped successfully with the button shortage of 1915, had built a vast mansion in the neighbourhood of Morton Prendiville, the very bathrooms of which covered more ground than the Manor House. Press photographers haunted the minx-like loveliness of Lady Miriam and Lady Rachel, immortalizing them with and without their dogs, horses, aeroplanes, swimming suits, and other possessions.

Gloria, as became a Prendiville, had always stood for that which is highest and noblest in woman. Her hair remained unshingled, her face and lips were undefiled by powder or lipstick, her skirts came well below the calves of her legs. Yet never a camera shutter clicked for her, whereas Lady Miriam's and Lady Rachel's knees were featured on all sides. Now Gloria found herself eclipsed even by James Overway as a thing of beauty, and the knowledge bit right to the bone.

All this came uppermost in her mind when, on a raw spring evening, she met James Overway in the village street. She had been to visit a sick horse belonging to a local tradesman which was not coming along at all as it should have done, in spite of the veterinary surgeon, and, oddly enough,

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Gloria had been able to suggest nothing new in the way of treatment. Perceiving James Overway she asked herself suddenly :—

" Can I be a failure, after all ? Frankly, I find James very baffling ; I'm not at all sure our marriage will be a success. And that horse absolutely baffles me, too. Are James and the horse straws showing which way the wind blows ? "

On this mood of depression James Overway burst with annoying brightness. He had just played a leading part in the defeat on the golf links of a team of prominent bankers by a team of prominent chartered accountants. The masterly approach shot which had enabled him to become one up at the tenth still lingered in his mind. He halted in front of her, radiating manly assurance, and took her by the hand.

" How appropriate this is ! " he cried. " Now I can lay my laurels at your feet. We simply tore them up and stamped on their faces. There are bits of banker lying about in every bunker."

" I saw your photograph in *Daily Pictures* this morning," she answered, irrelevantly. " It is also in this week's *Prattler* and *Countryside*."

" And it will be in *Daily Pictures* again to-morrow with the rest of the team."

" Sometimes I wonder whether I'm engaged to a man or a public monument ! "

" What do you mean, Gloria, dear ? "

" I feel that when I'm married to you we shall be a kind of spectacle like two bears at the Zoo. People will point at me and say : ' Do you see that woman in pink ? She's the wife of the man who did the seventh hole at Morton Prendiville in one.' Even when you take me in your arms I shall wonder if you're holding me with the overlapping grip."

James Overway stood his ground.

" Don't you think you're doing a little spiritual slicing, Gloria ? I doubt if the club-face of your mind is meeting the ball of life fairly and squarely to-day. Remember that Providence has placed us on the golf course of this world to do our best. Some of us drive straight down the ' pretty ' and some of us get into the rough. Some find life's greens smooth and fair, and some have their best putts marred through a worm-cast engineered by the Evil One. But the mashie-niblick of cheerfulness will get us out of the worst bunkers, or so I have discovered."

Slowly she shook her head, her unpowdered nose gleaming like an iron club skilfully polished by some zealous caddie.

" One day soon we will have a long talk. At the moment I must hurry home to father. This coming General Election has upset him very much, because he hates going about the district making speeches and kissing the babies of the voters. Good night, James. I try to believe you mean well."

IV.

LITTLE did James Overway dream, as Gloria faded with the calm gait of one of the late Queen Victoria's Mistresses of the Robes into the evening mist, that Fate was busy about his future. Precisely at that moment Walter Gubbany, chairman of the Northern and Southern Bank, his opponent on the links that afternoon, sat sipping a cocktail. He sipped it in the smoking-room of another chairman, Singleton Carew, who presided over a local political association.

" Good of you to have me for the night. Who are you running for Parliament in this election ? " asked Walter Gubbany.

" Devilish nice of you to stay with us. Old Jasper Prendiville, as usual, I suppose. All solid bone above the ears, but he carries the landed interests with him."

" Now there, Carew, you're quite wrong. You forget all those new factories at Ocking Minima and Wandle-by-the-Rushes. You forget all the Napoleons of commerce and princes of industry who've built houses near the golf club. I was lunching with the Prime Minister only last week. He told me the new professional at West Heath has put yards on his drive, and he also said that he favoured candidates who stood well in financial circles. The man you ought to run is that feller Overway. A sound golfer—did the seventh in one, I understand, and gave me no end of a hiding this afternoon—and has sound business relations with the Bank. Now, Carew, a man doesn't have business relations with the Bank for nothing. The Bank is mighty particular, I can tell you."

" Just another drain ? Do you good. Do us both good," Singleton Carew suggested. " Well, I don't know. I'm inclined to agree with you. Jasper's getting old, and he was very rooty tooty with me when I met him the other day, very. I'll put it before the Association."

Thus and no otherwise came James Overway to be invited to represent the Morton Prendiville Division in Parliament, and Sir Jasper Prendiville, Bart, J.P., to receive the following letter :—

" Central Committee Rooms,
Morton Prendiville.

" Dear Sir Jasper,—

" As you are aware, a General Election is imminent, and I am desired by my Association to say that, in view of your advancing years and devoted labours on behalf of your constituency, they feel it only right that in the

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evening of your days you should be spared some of the public work you have so unselfishly undertaken, and be given an opportunity to enjoy such leisure as remains to you, unhampered by outside calls.

"My Association has decided, therefore, to ask Mr. James Overway to stand for the Morton Prendiville Division in the forthcoming election. I am to add an expression of my Association's gratitude for your unstinted endeavours in the past, with which pray allow me to identify myself.

"Yours very faithfully,

*"*SINGLETON CAREW,

"Chairman."

When Sir Jasper had read this his furious neighing could be heard all over the Manor House. The butler and footmen looked at each other with blanched faces, and in the kennels hounds threw up their heads and howled as though banshees were abroad.

"If only her late ladyship were still alive!" whimpered the butler. "I never heard him take on so since an earth-stopper answered him back in '86."

Naturally, Gloria hastened to the library, for, after all, if a daughter's place is not by her father's side in his hour of anguish, where is it? She picked up a crumpled ball of paper from the floor, spread it out, and read Singleton Carew's letter.

"Thank Heaven," she exclaimed, "James would never accept such an invitation."

"Better not!" Sir Jasper stuttered. "If did, break neck. Break feller Carew's neck. Break all necks. Swabs! Tinkers! Tailors!"

"I will ask James to tea, father, and hear his answer from his own mouth."

Bellow, bellow, bellow went Sir Jasper.

That afternoon, in consequence of invitation received, James Overway sat in Gloria's drawing-room. Somehow, to his love-sharpened senses, a clammy doom overspread the proceedings like artificial snow on a refrigerating plant. When the butler had set down his burden and retired, Gloria dispensed tea in silence. Then she began, clearly and kindly:—

"James, it has come to father's knowledge that you have been asked to represent Morton Prendiville in Parliament."

At those words James's tea and toast appeared to him instantly in the light of the condemned man's last breakfast. Then, clearing his throat and tugging slightly at his collar, he answered:—

"As a matter of fact I have."

"Of course you refused the request?"

"On the contrary, I accepted it."

"But, James, why, how——?"

"But, Gloria, why not?"

Far too much a lady to throw the teapot at him, Gloria answered:—

"Do you suppose father could possibly look on you as a son-in-law in such circumstances?"

"But I've looked upon him as a father-in-law when the position was reversed. A cat may look at a king. A caddie may look at an open champion. After all, the old gentleman can't take a full swing any longer. He's got to the age when he must retire to the club-house veranda and watch younger men slosh them off the first tee. Now that his trembling hand can no longer control the driver I may as well replace him as anyone else, and keep the record for the course in the family. Surely you wouldn't like to see a stranger's name engraved on the local challenge cup, would you?"

But Gloria had risen and withdrawn a ring set with a square-cut diamond from the third finger of her left hand.

"Mr. Overway," she said, coldly, "our engagement is at an end. I am cruelly disappointed in you. Far be it from me to overwhelm you with reproaches, but I never wish to see you again. I trust you will not prolong this painful interview."

Trembling like a boy about to drive off in his first medal competition, James Overway hurried from the room.

V.

LOOKING back on his political career in after years, with his sturdy child telephoning to a friend in New York in the hall, and his good wife tuning up her light aeroplane on the landing ground outside his library window, James Overway was wont to muse on the barrenness of success and the bitterness of jealous rivals.

Swept into Parliament on the tide of an enormous majority, those qualities of strength and tenacity acquired in the bunker and on the green stood him in good stead. True to the promise of a brilliant maiden speech he early became a marked man, so that it surprised no one when, in one of the periodic re-shuffles of offices, Mr. Gamble, the Prime Minister, spoke to the Party Manager as follows:—

"The First Lord of the Admiralty shall become President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Chancellor of the Exchequer shall become Secretary of State for War, the Secretary of State for War shall be canned, and we will make that fellow Overhead—Overdraft—no, Overway, Chancellor of the Exchequer. It's a pity he's a chartered accountant; the permanent officials won't like it, but he's a thundering

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good golfer, and that'll please the public. You remember, Harry, he once did the seventh at Morton Prendiville in one."

Strangely enough, at this point the star of James Overway began to wane. True he proved an irreproachable Chancellor, turning a deficit of revenue into a surplus and removing twopence in the pound from the income-tax, but the fickle public were tired of their idol. His political integrity being spotless, they attacked the most sacred intimacy of his private life, namely, his golf.

When he rose to speak in the House, members of the Opposition would greet him with derisive cries of "Fore!" Cartoonists pictured him in plus-fours, a garment he had never worn. It was declared that, just as Nero fiddled while Rome burned, so James Overway played golf during national crises.

Thus it came about that one summer Saturday afternoon he sat alone on the veranda of the golf club, watching happy members sock them well and truly or slice them into the rough, as the case might be. He himself had been unable to get a game; in his exalted position his intimates were few, and of these most desired to be given too many strokes by a man who had done the seventh in one to make it worth James's while. He had got weary of losing money. He contrasted Gloria's happiness, married to a retired Inspector-General of Cavalry, with his own lonely lot, and a wild idea was born in his brain to rid himself of the curse imposed on him by having done the seventh hole in one.

Presently he went in search of Albert Price, who had caddied for him on that fatal day. In a discreet corner between the professional's shop and the caddies' room he addressed the lad.

"Albert, do you remember the day on which I was alleged by you to have done the seventh in one?"

Albert Price, who had a distressing habit of sniffing, sniffed, and answered:—

"Yessir."

"I am not at all sure that you told the truth about my shot."

Albert Price, who seldom told the truth, and had discovered that whatever a boy says is generally wrong, merely sniffed and held his peace.

"I suggest, Albert, that you ran on well ahead of Mr. Whinney, myself, and Mr. Whinney's caddie, found the ball on the brink of the hole, and pushed it in surreptitiously."

Albert Price pawed the ground with one foot and sniffed again with peculiar horribleness. He knew that, never mind what was coming, he would be for it.

"You realize, of course, that this disgraceful action of yours was bound to be revealed sooner or later. Never mind how I came to hear of it. My good name is at stake, Albert."

"Yessir," responded Albert, non-committally, and sniffed.

"I am prepared to overlook the matter if you provide me with a signed confession, but naturally you couldn't remain with the club. However, I am willing to pay your passage to Australia, give you an outfit allowance, and see you well started on a sheep ranch belonging to a friend of mine."

"I got an uncle in Orsetrilyer," Albert Price contributed, helpfully.

"Mr. Overway," she said, coldly, "our engagement is at an end."

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" That sunny land will still your natural hunger for the great wide spaces," continued James Overway, and proceeded to talk like an emigration poster for some minutes. He then shook hands, and Albert Price, with one long-drawn, harrowing sniff, departed.

Two days later, James Overway handed Albert's confession to the club secretary in his private office. Colonel Gates read it, laid aside the paper, and looked James in the eye.

" My dear fellow," he said, " it's too late. You've eaten the congratulatory dinner, we've unveiled a tablet in the hall and accepted the golf-ball suitably mounted. We should all look fools. You'll have to stick to it now."

" But how can I stick to a lie ? "

Colonel Gates smiled sadly.

" Sometimes it's expedient to lie for the honour of the regiment, Overway. I remember when I was senior subaltern a youngster of ours refused. A subalterns' court-martial, over which I presided, sentenced him to have his hair rubbed with strawberry jam and then powdered with flour. The sentence was duly carried out. By the way, you had better send young Price to Australia just the same. I know the lad you mean ; sniffs, doesn't he ? "

James Overway nodded in the manner of an irresistible force when it meets an immovable obstacle.

" Oh, well," he answered, " it's a fine morning. Come and play a round of golf with me, and let us play without caddies. I hate the very sound of the word caddie."

Never had the Morton Prendiville golf course meant more to James than on this beautiful day of summer, with its smiling greens, its skilfully-placed bunkers flanked by crisp, yellow sand. Even the revolting thick-set of the rough appeared less gruesome than usual. Not that the rough had any terrors for the Colonel or himself on this occasion. They drove straight as arrows, their approach shots pitched to a nicety, their putts never failed. At the sixth they were all square, and James, who had the honour, teed up his ball on the seventh with a happy smile.

THE seventh is an iron shot, bogey being three. James came back slowly ; there followed the sweet, clean click of perfect timing ; the ball soared in an ideal trajectory ; it fell in the centre of the green, almost, it seemed, upon the little red flag fluttering so bravely. Did, or did not, a faint tintinnabulation as of a golf-ball impinging upon metal greet their startled ears ?

A painful constriction attacked James's throat and his tongue felt dry within his mouth. In dead silence the Colonel drove. His ball pitched on the edge of the green, bounded, and rolled down into a bunker. In dead silence the two men picked up their bags and strode purposefully downhill. Upon the green they could see no sign of a ball. Withdrawing their putters mechanically, and laying down their bags at the edge of the green, they advanced on the metal receptacle sunk in its centre. There the alarming truth became manifest.

For the second time James Overway had done the seventh hole in one.

During his military career Colonel Gates had often found himself in a tight corner. When the cartridges ran out he had heard the front files shout : " Ho ! Ammunition mules an' Gunga Din ! " as is always done in the best regiments. Therefore he merely turned to James Overway and inquired :—

" You were playing a Golden Queen, I believe ? "

James could only nod.

The Colonel stooped and inspected the ball jammed between the pin and the socket. It was indeed a Golden Queen.

Amid dead silence Colonel Gates rose and held out a steady hand.

" On behalf of the club," he began, " congratters, old boy. Hefty bit of work, by Gad ! They'll have something to say in the papers about this. Odds against it must be a million to one. Occasion of a lifetime."

James Overway shook his head.

" No," he answered, firmly. " No, Gates. The papers will say nothing, because they will never be told. I charge you, on your word of honour, to keep this occurrence secret."

" But—— " said the Colonel.

" Ah ! " replied James Overway, " you don't realize the truth. This is an omen. The gods are too civil to me. They have marked me out for destruction."

He paused and drew a deep breath.

" Think ! " he went on. " Has the fact that I did this hole in one brought me happiness ? Frankly it has not. Material success followed, but I lost the girl I loved, I became a distinguished yet lonely figure in the Government, people refused to play golf with me unless I gave them ridiculous odds, and my life has been embittered by the jealousy of my rivals. And now I have done this hole in one again. Can you suppose that doesn't mean something ? Darn it, my dear fellow, do have a little common sense ! "

" But—— " said the Colonel.

" So," continued James Overway, " I shall resign the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, I shall apply for the Chiltern Hundreds, and I shall never play golf again."

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"Not—play—golf?" gasped Colonel Gates, as moved as if he had seen an intelligent lance-corporal come on parade at the trail. And then in horror he beheld James Overway solemnly break his putter across his knee.

In horror the Colonel beheld James Overway solemnly break his putter across his knee.

VI.

A MONTH later, when the excitement caused by his retirement from golf and politics had died down, James Overway, in spotless white flannels, descended from his car at his tennis club, and walked with a jaunty swing long absent from his gait towards the courts. Sauntering slowly ahead of him he perceived a nineteen-year-old slip of shingled slenderness in a very short tennis frock that revealed her bare arms, adorable legs in impalpable nude stockings, and little pale-blue socks turned over her buckskin shoes. From the socks James deduced instantly that her eyes were blue also.

Imperceptibly he quickened his stride. Under that cap of shingled gold, he felt, only the most perfect face could lurk. As he passed her, a keen glance proved him to be right.

All in a second the nineteen-year-old slip, whose name was Marigold, realized that here came a rich, desirable man in the early forties yet not bald, who had suffered much and felt on the point of rebounding from his past agonies; that she was the youngest of six without a bean beyond her inadequate dress allowance, and that her father lacked utterly the financial ability to give her the background she deserved.

Therefore she looked at James Overway as though he were someone unspeakable, and looked away so that he might take in all her young loveliness without appearing to stare. James took it in, and said in his soul: "After all, I don't know her, but that is easily remedied."

Even thus, when James in after years looked back on his political career, Marigold Overway came to be tuning up her light aeroplane on the landing ground outside his library window while in the hall their sturdy child telephoned to a friend in New York.

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That State of Life

By

ROLAND PERTWEE

Illustrated by
CHARLES CROMBIE

WHEN Albert Remo looked over his shoulder into the past he was a proud man, for the Remos, beyond the memory of the most aged and the record of stage historians, had belonged to the Profession in all its variants. Back in the Middle Ages, when Puccio D'Aniello, the original Punch, was delighting the Neapolitans with his wit and antics, the Remos were tumbling and fooling every whit as well—and some say better. Of the great company of strolling players, they wandered over the civilized world, bringing with them laughter and amazement, and as often finding no better reward for their gifts than the scant hospitality of the village stocks. Faithful always to their calling, they drifted down the ages until with the march of time humanity no longer arraigned them as rogues and vagabonds, but gave them a place in the world with electric-lit stages to act upon, a vote to provide a sense of citizenship, and slightly reduced fares on the railways, whereby on Sundays they might travel from town to town in the odorous company of fish.

Albert Remo felt, and felt with reason, that he possessed a background. The pride of birth was present in him. He did not envy any ninth Baron in the land, for he, too, sprang from a stock that was steadfast in upholding its traditions.

Those who do not understand the Profession may argue that Albert and all the other Remos, as far back as memory goes, had little to show as a result of their traditions. That is the argument of materialism. It is not the fashion of actors to die rich nor to leave behind them monuments in the shape of great mansions and estates. Their treasure is of a different kind. It runs in the veins of natural ability. It is accounted in the pages of provincial newspapers. It is banked in a passionate and unshakable determination never to fail the public. It is weighed out in dressing-room talks, when old triumphs bubble to the surface like good froth atop of a schooner of stout.

Albert Remo in his beginnings had more reason than mere pride of lineage to look behind him, and look watchfully. As a tiny boy, lithe and silvery as an eel, he made his first public appearance in an acrobatic act. Remo *père*, who in youth had been an agile and intrepid aerial trapeze artiste, had declined, with the advance of years and the increase of girth, to a horizontal position on the stage. There he lay with his feet in the air, and a small wooden chopper block under his head, tossing little Albert up and down and round and round with bewildering accuracy. Meanwhile Albert's mother, who had reached that time of life to which distance lends enchantment, occupied a less active *rôle* near the backcloth, where she was chiefly concerned in tossing a yellow silk handkerchief to Albert and her husband, or scattering resin upon the stage, from a perforated disinfectant tin. It cannot be said that the gaiety or wonderment of the audience was greatly increased by Rosa's modest contribution of talent, but there was nearly always someone in front who remembered her in her palmy pantomime days, and those with no such memories to inspire enthusiasm had little fault to find with the comely lines of the old lady's figure.

There was not much money in the act, and unless you were pretty sharp at getting into your seats you were well in the way of missing it altogether.

Rosa Remo, who did most of the practical thinking for the family, knew all too well

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that from being the first number on a vaudeville programme to becoming merely an occasional "fill-in" is a very short step. She and her husband had worked hard, but the day was rapidly approaching when there would be no more work for them to do. True, she had a bit put by for a rainy day, but it was a very little bit. The security of their old age depended exclusively upon an insurance into which hour by hour and day by day they had invested their accumulated wealth—of knowledge.

That insurance for six evening performances and two *matinées* every week spun and bounced upon his father's uplifted feet.

Small wonder that Rosa Remo, tossing the yellow kerchief, watched her little son as a miser watches his gold.

No one could deny that they gave Albert a wonderful education, even though it did not include history, mathematics, nor the study of ancient and modern languages.

Rosa, who in the past had possessed a fine fruity *mezzo*, taught Albert to sing, and sing very loud. Also she revealed to him a thousand tricks and wrinkles. His father, at one time a dancer of reputation—he had won the Lancashire open event for heel and toe in 1879—taught him many intricate steps, including the cellar-flap and the sweeping, swooping movements expected of demons who emerge from star-traps. Not alone upon Albert's body were their efforts concentrated. His mind received its measure of instruction. The Remos never lost an opportunity of introducing their little son to shining lights of the vaudeville or legitimate stage.

By the age of thirteen there was scarcely a "gag" with which Albert was unfamiliar. He could mimic to perfection Dan Leno, Herbert Campbell, Victoria Monks, T. E. Dunville, Marie Lloyd, and the rest. His "take off" of R. A. Roberts's great protean act had to be seen to be believed, and from peeps behind the cabinets of such illusionists as La Fayette, Albert had acquired a store of magic which many a meaner nature might have turned to account.

The Remos left nothing to chance. Their home life, crammed in a theatrical basket or crowded into a stuffy theatrical lodging, was governed by an untiring effort to get little Albert on. They encouraged him to be funny at meals—to crack jokes, pull faces, and do comic business with the cruet or mock tumbles over the door-mat. This kind of free play they never criticized, knowing well that the true artist is instinctively able to judge the success of his achievements.

Despite their early appearance in the bill, it was not the practice of the Remos to leave the theatre until the curtain had fallen on the last turn. It was necessary for Albert to spend as much time as possible in the right atmosphere. In face of this necessity, their own rather pathetic yearnings for bed were of very minor importance.

WHEN the show was over there was always a nice savoury supper to be discussed. Rosa Remo herself prepared the supper, cooking it in a little pan over a methylated spirit stove in the summer, or over a corner of the parlour fire in winter. Rare good feasts they were, too, piping hot and with a relish to them. Rosa Remo could toast cheese or fry a kipper with any woman in the land. And what she could do with tripe and onions, great Spanish onions, you would remember for days afterwards. One of Rosa's suppers washed down with a bottle of Guinness's stout was fare for a king.

As Albert Remo approached manhood his father's daily task became increasingly hard to fulfil. But for the fact that Albert was of the light build of your true comedian, it would have been impossible for Remo *père* to perform the act. Often, in the night, the old man would wake up with a groan, his two hands clapped upon his thighs. Then Rosa would rise from bed and knead and pummel the knotted muscles until the grip of the cramp had relaxed.

"Ah! that's the girl, that's the girl, ah-h!" muttered the poor old tumbler in his agony.

And Rosa would rub away and smile, while fear plucked at her heart.

The end came suddenly and very mercifully.

Albert had attracted the notice of Burno—the great Burno, whose troops of knock-about comedians, under the titles of Burno's Sleepy-heads, Burno's Bread-line, and the like, were "head-liners" on the best vaudeville circuits in the country. Burno, who had watched some of Albert's fooling behind the scenes, had a talk with old Remo.

"Clever kid—neat. Got a spark in 'im. What 'ud y' say to turning him over to me?"

It was the moment old Remo had been waiting for—but he shook his head.

"There's our own act to be considered. That's no ordinary boy. Must see what his mother has to say."

His mother had a great deal to say.

"Not a penny less than two pounds ten," she told her husband.

"Not a penny less than five pounds," she told Burno.

A bargain was struck at three guineas a week. A contract was signed for one year—no less. Rosa took the contract to a lawyer and he said it was all right. Then, and not until then, did she feel secure.

Albert was told, and being sentimental, as are all show folk, he threw himself down

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on a roll of stage cloth and cried dismally on the back of a grubby hand. And while he cried, a wardrobe mistress, a cleaner, and a little girl in tights and shorts and a red tam-o'-shanter brought him kisses and comfort. For in the Profession another's sorrows are as real as one's own.

That night witnessed the end.

To the accompaniment of a sustained G the curtain rose on a smiling Rosa, very correctly standing at attention near the backcloth. A second later, light as a bird, Albert leapt on to the stage, one hand upon his heart and the other stretched towards the entrance through which his father, with ponderous grace, would appear. But something had gone wrong with the sequence, and for the first time in his life Remo *père* missed his entrance. He was late, and when eventually he appeared he was no longer an example of fine maturity, but a little old man who shuffled his feet and seemed tired to the bone. Section by section he settled down upon the stage, rested his head on the wooden chopper block, and raised his weary legs.

Rosa Remo tossed the kerchief, Albert caught it, dusted his hands, and tossed it back again.

"Allez-oop!" he cried and sprang, landing fair and square upon his father's feet.

But instead of the bewildering whirl that should have followed, old Remo's legs bent at the knees—then, sagging this way and that way, crumpled like a concertina.

Old Remo sat up with fingers pressed against the swollen veins in his forehead.

"I can't do it—no use," he said.

With her faultless sense of the theatre, Rosa Remo rescued their final appearance from ridicule. Addressing the audience, she said:—

"One can't go on for ever—can one?" Then to her husband, down whose cheeks the tears were running: "Don't you bother, Fred. I've a nice bit of supper at home."

And Albert Remo, bred in the knowledge that the first duty of every actor is never, never, never to let an audience down, flung himself into an impromptu break-down dance while his mother led the groping old man off.

SO the elder Remos took two little rooms in a house at Brixton, which is where actors are born and where they go to die, while Albert Remo, with five hundred years of histrionic background to sustain him, climbed rung by rung up the ladder of public favour.

It was, at first, a lonely business and a frugal life. Every week he sent two of his three guineas home. Greatly he missed the support, advice, and love with which from infancy he had been surrounded. Terribly he yearned for those savoury suppers his mother had always hotted up after the show, and the talk of shop which had gone with them. He had, it is true, the comfortable assurance that he was getting on and making good, but the absence of intimate companionship was very hard to bear. Had it not been for his lucky encounter with Ruthie Welcome, he might well have developed into a sad young man.

He first met Ruthie at Rochdale Station late one Saturday night, where the two of them were waiting for a train to take them North. Ruthie had a few steps and a couple of lines in a musical show called "Fairy Belle." Although Ruthie's background was not so impressive as Albert's, four generations of Welcomes had earned their living more or less directly upon the boards. Ruthie's grandfather had been a very well-known property man, and he had brought up Ruthie's mother to be a wardrobe mistress. Ruthie's father had been a stage carpenter, who had once played the part of a warder in a travelling melodrama. A taste for beer had proved his undoing and had aggravated the necessity for Ruthie to go on the stage at the tender age of seven. A railway accident briefly finished off the work of killing her father which beer had so effectively begun. Unhappily, her mother was killed at the same time.

Ruthie was nineteen and Albert twenty when first they met. Ruthie was sitting on a theatrical basket, shivering under the keen blade of the wind. Albert passed her once or twice before speaking.

"Cold, kiddie?" he asked.

"Am rather," she nodded.

"Have my coat," he said, and would accept no refusal.

"Now you're cold," said she.

Albert made light of that. Ruthie insisted.

So they shared the coat—buttoning the lowest button and putting their arms round each other's waists as was needful.

"Why're you travelling Saturday night instead of Sun.?" he asked.

"Manager said we could. Saves a night's lodging."

"Same here," said Albert. "After all, two shillings is two shillings." He paused. "Had any supper?"

She shook her head.

"Had to give up my room midday."

"I've a couple of bangers and a meth stove in that bag," he told her. "If we could get a carriage to ourselves——"

They did.

In the Profession it is not good manners to refuse hospitality, even though one may be robbing one's host of his victuals.

"I'll cook," said Ruthie.

In the circumstances even Albert's mother

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dawn wind swept her pretty hair into his eyes.

" Better now," she said, and relapsed upon the seat.

Albert lent her a comb to tidy herself.

" That's a dear," he said. Then, " My word, you are a dear, too."

Somehow to kiss her and be kissed by her was the most natural thing in the world—and the best. After that they didn't talk any more.

So they were married, because they loved one another and because two can live cheaper than one, which is a great advantage when that one has already two depending upon him.

RUTHIE and Rosa had a wonderful evening together when, a few weeks after the wedding, Albert brought her home for Christmas. He also brought a fowl, a box of figs, and a bottle of port.

Père Remo had aged greatly and his mind had clouded. With the relaxation of the rigid discipline of stage life his whole existence had become vague and negative. As Rosa told Albert :—

" By the time your father has got himself up in the morning, he's done for the day."

Ruthie's unstinted admiration for Albert swiftly banished the mother's natural hostility. Indeed, the meal over, she whisked Ruthie off to the bedroom for a good old talk.

" You've got the best boy in the profession," she said.

Ruthie agreed, and added that the trouble she had to make Albert wear wool next to the skin no one would believe.

" You make him," Rosa insisted. " Good woollens and the right kind of supper is what a man wants to keep him right."

" That's what I say," said Ruthie.

Rosa Remo dropped her voice confidentially.

" I'll tell you what I've told no one else," said she ; " if you're toasting cheese, remember this—two tablespoonfuls of beer and one drop of vinegar make all the difference."

After that they fell to talking of the future. Of course, it was Albert's future they talked of—for with marriage Ruthie had sunk all her personal ambitions in her husband.

" Mark my words," she said, " he'll be in London before we know where we are."

It was a big prophecy, for your average provincial actor knows too well that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for him to enter into the West-end of London.

" It's right. He will," Rosa agreed, and spoke of a little house she had seen in the very best part of Brixton.

" ——bit of a garden in front and everything just so."

Next morning, which was Boxing Day, the two women rose at first light and, standing before the railings of the little house, marvelled greatly at its beauty.

" I can just see my Albert taking his hat from the hall-stand and coming through the iron gate. I can just see him," said Ruthie, glowing.

" Keep on seein' that, and be sure you'll see it in earnest one day," Rosa nodded.

Albert and Ruthie caught the eleven o'clock train for Southampton, where they were engaged to appear in " Jack and the Bean Stalk."

Now, although it is not generally known, the great ones of the theatrical profession—those mighty gentlemen with Oriental names—sometimes scour the provinces at Christmas-time in search of new talent. Often these scourings are fruitless, but now and then they make a discovery which results in some small and startled performer being given his chance in the Metropolis.

Years passed before any such happening fell to the lot of Albert Remo—but fall it did, and like a bolt from the blue.

Mortimer Heilbron, who was responsible for the productions at the Alcazar, dropped the bolt when Albert was playing the Widow Twanky at the Bradford " panto." And the day after the season ended Albert found himself rehearsing with a galaxy of West-end stars, Spanish and Russian dancers and American jazz specialists, on a stage in Leicester Square.

Naturally he was nervous, but his nervousness did not react against his ability to develop his part. It sprang, chiefly, from embarrassment at finding himself in a new element and at being in receipt of a weekly salary which, by comparison with anything he had earned before, was enormous.

" Forty pounds a week, Ruthie. Forty."

And Ruthie, loyal to the core, and knowing his true worth, said :—

" And not half enough, either." After a pause she added : " We'll be able to save now—really save."

That afternoon, while Albert was rehearsing, she and Rosa revisited the little house, which by a miracle was still for sale. This time they had an " order to view," and having viewed they called on the agent and later on the representative of a building society, who subsequently admitted that, although he regarded himself as a shrewd business man, he was no match for the two ladies when it came to a bargain.

" God knows what you'll do with all the rooms, though," Rosa said, as they walked back.

" I'll find a use for the top floor presently," Ruthie answered, a shade nervously. Her heart leapt, for of a sudden she realized that

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Albert's yet unborn son would enter the world as a baby—a baby pure and simple—and not an insurance against his parents' old age.

Out in the High Street, with everyone looking, Rosa gave her daughter-in-law a good hug.

"But still there'll be too many," she said, with hesitance.

"There won't," Ruthie answered slowly. "Not when you and father are in the best front."

"You mean that, dear?"

"Well, I should think so. I'd like to see Albert consent to any other arrangement."

Rosa put out a hand against a shop front and swayed a little—her whole body was drenched in happiness.

"Leave me be—a minute—just a minute," she pleaded. Then, "Everything's all right." Then, "And sometimes, Ruthie, I may cook supper?"

"We'll take turn and turn about."

When old Remo was told the news he acted strangely.

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The final anxiety vanished from Rosa's horizon.

When old Remo was told the news he acted strangely. Spreading himself upon the floor, he tossed a cushion into the air and caught it on the soles of his feet.

"Allez-oop!" he cried, and kicked it high, so that in falling it dislodged a gas globe and involved the household in an expenditure of two shillings and ninepence. But all Rosa said was:—

"Fred's a wonderful old man, and, if it came to a pinch, he could still keep the lot of us."

THE habit of frugality dies hard, and although Albert Remo went from one success to another and his salary rose to three figures a week, the little house at Brixton called Talavera, the London General Omnibus service, and a modest wardrobe and table sufficed his simple needs.

A background of canvas tents, caravans, circuses, penny gaffs, and village barns had dowered him with the gift to act, but not to spend. He was unused to money—they were all unused to money. It was outside their ken, and as such was better put away safely in some place and not bothered about. Albert was too busy to bother about anything but his work, and Ruthie and his mother were too jealously disposed to allow any female servant to minister to his comforts. A "woman in" to do the rough work and rub out woollens was one thing—but to cook his victuals, make his bed, or mind his child was quite another. They would have torn any such intruder limb from limb. Besides, who was to know how these things should be done?

It was obvious to Albert that his work was a success, but he had not yet realized that he was a success—a successful man—a force and personality in the theatre of the day. On the stage he was a lion, but off he was a mouse—a mouse with a cosy little nest well stocked with toasted cheese.

Realization of his importance and the desire to make some gesture to demonstrate it were inspired by an article in an illustrated weekly.

Albert was used to Press notices following first nights and to interim boosts from the newspapers, but to find himself the subject of an article, independent of any particular performance, was a new experience.

He read with amazement glowing praises of his work and the perfection of his art.

The article concluded with the words:—

"Is it possible that Albert Remo is unaware of his greatness? To see him after reigning like a king for three hours on the stage, waiting on a wet street corner for a bus to transport him to his doll's house in Brixton, is to witness an apotheosis of modesty and retirement. Like a male Cinderella, he vanishes from the public eye at the stroke of twelve."

Albert's first feeling was annoyance. It was like having someone peeping through the window of one's private life. But when he read the article a second time a new sensation stole over him.

"The fellow's right," he said aloud. "Suppose I am all he says—what have I got to show for it? Nix. Cabinet Ministers don't earn what I earn, and haven't half the popularity." He stopped and thumped his chest. "Albert, give yourself a jerk—you've got there, o' man—got there big. Very well, my boy, what about it?"

He had already a good lump of savings. The need for economy no longer existed.

Very well, then, what about it?

The idea of getting a bit of style in his mode of living—of making a splash, being someone—revolved and expanded in his mind.

Of all the world's callings the Profession is the most secretive. An excusable alarm that someone will snoop your business and get it in first encourages every comedian to be wary. It was that instinct of caution persuaded Albert to say nothing, even to Ruthie, of the plans he was maturing.

He did not intend to expand by degrees; as soon would he contemplate going unprepared on to the stage on a first night. His natural showmanship demanded a complete and rehearsed effect.

He swiftly dismissed from his mind the project of moving to a larger house, since he knew instinctively that an upheaval involving his father and mother in a change of environment would give them pain rather than joy. They were too old to be shifted, and he was the last man wilfully to increase their domestic responsibilities. But to sport a car was another matter. A car could excite no personal jealousy—a nice little two-seater—or an open touring car—or why not a saloon? Yes, it should be a saloon—one of those smooth, egg-shaped saloons, bright as a patent-leather shoe. He could use it for theatre work at night, and Ruthie and his mother for shopping in the mornings. They'd love that, he supposed—he hoped, and pictured Rosa, a basket on her arm, travelling like a queen. But he did not picture the Remo car drawn up before the local butcher while Ruthie and his mother were defying the assistant to justify the rising price of tripe.

The realization that a car meant a chauffeur came with a shock to Albert. He had schooled himself to speak, and speak effectively from the stage, any line a character might be called upon to utter,

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but he doubted his ability to be as natural or effective in what he would have to say to a chauffeur. That was a new art—as yet unlearned. Under his breath he rehearsed a few words of command.

"Home, Chaucer. Savoy Grill, Chaucer. The Alcazar, Chaucer."

Long before he had taken any steps to buy the car, Chaucer, this mythical chauffeur, had become a real entity in his imagination. He conversed with Chaucer for hours on end.

"Carburettor all right to-day, Chaucer? Tyres standing up nicely?"

Once he dreamt of Chaucer and called out his name in the night. Ruthie woke with a start and demanded:—

"Who's Chaucer?" secretly congratulating herself that it was not a female name.

She had not turned on the light, and so saved Albert the embarrassment of being found blushing.

"Chaucer—wrote the Canterbury Tales, didn't he?" was the surprisingly erudite reply.

"But you're not reading them, Albert?"

"No, I was twisting them in my dreams."

She always laughed at his jokes, however silly they were. She laughed, found his hand, tucked it comfortably under her cheek, and went to sleep again.

The feel of her cheek against his fingers started a new idea.

"Rings—diamond rings—lots of 'em."

He saw about the rings next day. One had three large brilliants—another a big sapphire—the third was all about a pearl. Also he bought a garnet brooch for Rosa.

Albert paid cash.

"I want you to keep them until I let you know."

THE need of an appropriate wardrobe followed in natural sequence.

Somehow Albert found the Court tailors of Hanover Square and Savile Row even more unapproachable than the dignified Chaucer. An invisible barrier of cold superiority defended their premises against his intrusion. There was something about their austere absence of window decoration which offended his love of good showmanship. In his opinion, if you wanted to order a suit it was nice to see what kind of suit you were likely to get. The few rolls of sombre cloth hidden behind a gauze covering the lower half of the window were most inadequate encouragement. Once he actually stiffened his resolve to the pitch of going inside, but the atmosphere and the company that greeted him was so oppressive that he felt as though he were in the presence of death. An individual, evidently burdened by heavy sorrow, announced that he would have to wait for "quite a while."

Albert did business with a wrist watch, shook his head, and slipped out.

"Not again," said he, and directed his steps towards one of those establishments at the back of Charing Cross Road where actors who play earls may hire fur coats, and dress-suits may be had permanently or for the night, and where, when tired of buying clothes, you may obtain a saddle, a *papier-mâché* suit-case, a folding tent, a second-hand double-barrelled twelve-bore gun, or a pair of spurs.

Mr. Freidemann, the manager, greeted Albert with effusiveness which would have shocked and pained the tailors of Savile Row. He gave Albert his enthusiastic but not altogether undivided attention, for while listing Albert's requirements he disposed of a large bundle of assegais which he had acquired in discharge of a debt from a busted touring company.

"I want this stuff to be the last word," said Albert.

"It shall be the firtht and the latht."

"Dress-coat cut in crisp over the equator, double-breasted white vest with no back to it, and plenty of those new match-scratch shirts."

"I get you, Mithter Remo. Trutht uth."

Not in vain was that trust.

"Thend 'em home?" Mr. Freidemann inquired at the final fitting.

Albert shook his head.

"I'll tell you when."

He had planned that the coming out of the Remos should follow the termination of the show in which he was appearing. Until the last moment Ruthie was to be kept in ignorance. But while making his own preparations for splendour, Albert did not neglect her future needs.

Perhaps he felt a shade of self-reproach in not allowing her to participate in the delight of choosing her things, but to do so would rob the occasion of its surprise.

He got her a Persian lamb coat with a collar of kolinsky—having rejected one with a skunk collar on the ground that there weren't enough hairs in skunk; an evening wrap of rich velvet trimmed with white fox; a yellow frock and an artificial orchid to wear on the shoulder, and many other things. His nerve broke down on the matter of underwear and he let it go. For his mother he bought a black silk gown, and for his father, who hated new clothes, an M.C.C. necktie.

Finally Albert bought the car. The car was dark blue with a red line. It had cushions of dove-coloured velvet, an electric light in the roof, and two little vanity and comfort boxes on either side of the back seat. Apart from those quiffs, presumably it had an engine and other mechanical

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necessaries with which Albert did not concern himself.

The salesman, unused to customers who bought a car without demanding a cut of one-third off the list price or an allowance of one hundred pounds for a 1906 single-cylinder De Dion, was overcome with amazement.

"And now," said Albert, "I want a chauffeur."

It appeared that the salesman knew just the right fellow—a man who had served under him in the war—"an absolute professor." If Mr. Remo would return in an hour this paladin would be produced.

Albert had a few sandwiches at Sandy's Bar and walked back to Long Acre at the agreed time. He was very nervous of his first meeting with Chaucer, and determined to say as little as possible.

"Ah, here you are, sir," said the salesman; then, over his shoulder: "Jack, this is the gentleman."

A tall and not unpleasant-looking man stepped forth from behind an automobile and saluted formally.

"Sir," he said.

"So this is Chaucer," said Albert.

"Chaucer, no, sir; the man's name is Lunt."

"What, Lunt," Albert echoed; "you don't mean that? But I thought—no, stupid of me. 'Course his name is Lunt."

"As a matter of fact, sir," said the chauffeur, "Lunt is not my name. I use it for professional purposes. My real name is Frogmarch."

"Never!" said Albert, and added: "No wonder, then." An idea struck him. "But if not Frogmarch, why Lunt? Why not Chaucer?"

"If you prefer the name Chaucer, I am quite agreeable," the man replied.

"Good," said Albert; "then you're engaged. And would you please be outside the house with the car at seven-fifteen next Wednesday evening?"

"Seven-fifteen, sir. And the address would be?"

"Talavera, Brown's Walk, Brixton."

"I will make it my duty to find out where that is, sir."

"Do," said Albert.

"And you would wish me to take rooms in that neighbourhood?"

"If convenient," said Albert.

He left the salesman to settle terms.

ON the last day of his simple life, before entering into their future splendour, Albert gave exact instructions as to the delivery of his purchases.

Ruthie was behind the scenes at the final performance of Albert's show at the Alcazar.

"A week's holiday before you start rehearsing again'll do you a world of good," said she, tidying away his wigs and make-ups in a theatrical basket. "We might run down to Brighton for a day or two."

Albert started.

"What? No. No, ol' gal; home's good enough for me."

"Nothing's too good, though."

He did not reply for a minute, but sat staring at his finger-nails. Then—

"I hope not," he said, "but I can't help wondering."

Ruthie pulled on her hat.

"Ready?" she asked. "We might walk across the park and take the tram."

"If you'd like to," he said, and took her arm.

They walked down Haymarket and thence by the Duke of York's Column across the Mall. On the bridge that spans the lake they paused and with locked fingers watched the ghostly image of Buckingham Palace in the water.

"Funny job to be a king," he mused.

"Is it? Dunno!" said Ruthie.

"Not to be able to escape," he went on. "To break loose, to come down and be ordinary."

"He's got to stop where he belongs, like anyone else," was the practical rejoinder.

Albert shivered and excused himself with—

"Parky to-night; let's get on, eh?"

Later, as they lay in bed, Ruthie had a vague conviction that Albert was nervous about something. He gave her the same impression at breakfast next morning.

"You and mother hurry over your shopping. I'd like you back by twelve," he said.

"Thinking of a *matinée?*" Ruthie asked.

"No, not that. Oh, forgot to say. We're going to the 'Queen of Hearts' to-night."

"Got some tickets?"

He nodded.

"Thought they'd suspended the free list."

"I bought 'em," he said, with an airy gesture.

"Then I hope you got circle. It's one of those fashionable shows and I've nothing to wear."

"Got the royal box, as matter of fact."

"Don't be silly, Albert."

He tossed an envelope across the table.

"Look for yourself."

Ruthie looked and coloured.

"Fancy doing that," she said. "A nice fool I shall look; and you haven't got a white waistcoat."

It was Rosa who came to the rescue.

"You do the shopping, dear, and I'll stay back and press up your yellow."

But even so Ruthie went off a shade indignantly.

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Shortly afterwards a van from Fortnum and Mason deposited at the back door a hamper containing a complete cold collation.

To the amazed Rosa, Albert casually suggested dinner at a quarter to seven.

"I suppose," said the old lady, quivering from head to foot, "what I cook isn't good enough."

Like a scared child Albert vanished into the back garden, where his father, seated in a wooden arm-chair, was enjoying his usual occupation of watching the tortoise.

"He is rare and active this morning," said old Remo. "Rare and active. Must have moved best part of a yard since I come out."

FIVE minutes after Ruthie's return from the shops a special messenger delivered the Persian lamb coat.

There was no question of doubt as to her joy.

"You darling!" she cried, and flung her arms round Albert's neck.

The embrace was interrupted by the arrival of Rosa's black silk dress. After that, every quarter of an hour throughout the afternoon some new symbol of splendour and riches arrived at the house. There simply wasn't time to look at nor place to put everything. Stockings, shoes, furs, hats, and even furniture. The parlour and the bedrooms became veritable treasure chests.

The two women's first thought was that Albert had gone mad, but rapture and surprise soon banished their misgivings.

"He's doing what's proper," said Rosa, stoutly. "He's taking his right place in the world, and what we've got to do is to live up to him."

At six o'clock Albert and Ruthie went upstairs to dress, leaving Rosa to prepare the table and the old man to wrestle with his new necktie.

"Oh, Albert!" said Ruthie, brushing her pretty hair with the new ivory hair-brushes. "I only hope we'll never, never, never let you down."

She turned and looked at him—immaculate in his wasp-waisted dress-coat and ribbon-wide vest. He was wonderful. Wonderful. Before such perfection the Prince of Wales himself would suffer eclipse.

Under the admiration in her eyes Albert stooped and kissed the nape of her neck.

"For Heaven's sake, don't break your shirt front," she beseeched.

With his own hands he pinned the orchid to the shoulder of her gown.

"The loveliest girl in London and the best," he said.

They entered the little dining-room side by side, and behold, when the ladies shook out their napkins, to the accompaniment of gasps of amazement, rings and brooches tinkled and tumbled upon their plates.

"We ought to have ordered a taxi," Ruthie exclaimed.

"I've seen to that," said Albert.

In the excitement, laughter, and amazement old Remo took no part. With his chair pushed back and painfully conscious of his new necktie he stared at the jewelled splendour of his wife and his children with a kind of dull hostility, while generations of penurious players passed like shadows across the cloudy recesses of his mind.

He heard Rosa speaking with strained refinement.

"If need be we'll move from here to where we belong."

Where we belong? The words echoed in the old mummer's ears. Where we belong. The caravan—the flare-lit marquees of a circus—the old barn—the village stocks. And suddenly he said aloud:—

"You won't—it can't be done."

"Don't be silly, Fred. Folks must move with the times."

"There are no times," he mumbled, "no times—no change—we are servants of the Public—and that's enough."

Something caught uncomfortably at Albert's throat.

"Might see if the—the taxi's there," he suggested.

Ruthie drew the curtain aside.

"A car," she cried.

"Didn't I mention a car?" said Albert, fingering his collar.

"A shoffer," cried Rosa, who had joined Ruthie at the window.

"I wouldn't let him see you looking," Albert suggested.

Ruthie thrust the curtain back into place. The responsibility of property—the obligation of the employer—the preservation of dignity was in the gesture.

"Ours?" she whispered.

"No, yours, dear."

Rosa breathed anxiously.

"Had I better ask him in for a glass of stout?"

Albert shook his head.

"No—no, p'r'aps not. 'Course not. It wouldn't—do."

Rosa nodded.

"I'll slip upstairs and pop on my cloak," said Ruthie.

"You'll find me at the—car," said Albert.

Ruthie climbed the stairs, biting her lip.

"G'night, mother," said Albert, and, collecting his coat and a silk hat from a chair in the hall, strolled negligently across the strip of front garden.

Chaucer threw open the car door and touched his cap.

"Thanks, I'll wait for—madam," said

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"Ah, here she is!" he exclaimed, gratefully.

And Ruthie was marvellous. The way she came through the front door and down the steps with toes pointed and her cloak held together with her hand, but just open enough to reveal a white shoulder and the purple orchid, was a *tour de force*. Albert fairly glowed with pride. No peeress could have walked more proudly or seemed more to the manner born.

That she impressed Chaucer was revealed by the rapidity with which he switched on the light inside the car and leapt forward to hold the iron gate.

"Hey, Ruthie, what am I to cook for Albert's supper?"

"My dear, this is Chaucer, our new chauffeur," said Albert.

"Oh, yes," Ruthie replied, with an exquisite insinuation of boredom.

Chaucer was at the car door now, holding it open and bowing gravely.

"Then if you're ready, my dear, we'll make a start," said Albert.

It was at the moment Ruthie was raising her dainty foot to enter the car that Rosa threw up the parlour window and shouted:—

"Hey, Ruthie, what am I to cook for Albert's supper?"

There was no time for thought between question and answer. Without a second's pause Ruthie swung her head round and shouted back:—

"Tripe."

An instant later she clapped her hand to her mouth and stared in horror at Albert. But there was no indignation in his eyes, only a great relief. He put out a hand and fondled her pretty cheek.

"Good for you, girl," he said. "Good for you." Then to Chaucer, upon whose grave countenance a smile was beginning to grow: "Hop inside, boy, and make the old buzz box move along. Yes, and switch off this light. Me and Ruthie don't want looking at."

As the car glided into the High Street, Ruthie slipped her fingers into the palm of Albert's hand.

"Can you ever forgive me?"

"Oh, rot!" he said. "All rot. And this is rot, too. A bit of fun, perhaps, but it doesn't *mean* anything. Come on, snuggle up, darling."

And they fell to talking about a bit of business which he meant to introduce into his new show.

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GREAT BOWLERS OF ALL TIME

By COL. PHILIP TREVOR, C.B.E.

WHEN recently in THE STRAND MAGAZINE I discussed the great batsmen of all time I insisted in advance on fixing a standard of measurement. To arrange in any sort of order of merit the great bowlers of all time is a much more complicated business, for the simple reason that a single standard will be insufficient by which to measure. Quite apart from any technical considerations, stamina and temperament must each count for a good deal. To borrow a financial expression, you cannot measure by a gold standard here.

I am going ruthlessly to rule out of consideration all the bowlers who performed prior to the 'eighties—indeed, to the late 'eighties. And I do so for two main reasons. First, because in the distant days which I exclude the wicket as often as not helped the bowler; and secondly, because after number five, six, or, say, seven on the batting list, you got to the "rabbits." In such conditions to take seven wickets for forty runs was not a terrific achievement. It was no doubt the great, and I cannot help adding the lamentable, improvement in wickets which led to the establishment of the "all batsmen team," in which your number eleven could reasonably be expected to make forty or fifty runs on a plumb wicket. In the old, old days, the state of a wicket decided the policy of even your best batsman, and consequently induced him to try to make hay while the sun shone. He realized well enough that at any moment the vagaries of the wicket might turn an ordinary good length ball into a "fizzer," and that such a fizzer would probably be fatal to him or to any other batsman living, bar, of course, "the Champion." So he was induced to take risks, and that is what every bowler of every age, class, country, or temperament wants every batsman to do.

ABOLITION OF "THE SHOOTER."

THE first thing the improvement of the wicket by artificial means did for the batsman was to abolish that essentially deadly ball, "the shooter." I am not yet a Methuselah, but I have an accurate and lively recollection of the shooter. And if your crude retort is: "Tell that to the Marines!" I shall inform you politely that the Marines of my day knew all about it. In the happy Service cricket I played at Portsmouth some forty-odd years ago, the Marines often did that shooter on me. Yet about that time it was beginning to get scarce on good grounds and in good matches. By the late 'eighties or early 'nineties it was almost a thing of the past in first-class cricket. Nowadays a batsman wishing to excuse his failure to deal with a ball which has kept low will say indignantly: "My dear chap, the beastly thing crept!" And if he is of the bad-tempered type he will probably seek out the poor groundsman and accuse him of dereliction of duty.

One conversation which I heard in regard to this matter still lingers in my memory. It was about thirty years ago, and a then famous batsman had been bowled by a ball which hit the stumps, I should judge, about four or five inches from their base. He was a great authority on the game, and he argued the matter with the groundsman. He listened judicially to what the groundsman had to say, but he came to the final conclusion, nevertheless, that it should only be once in a proverbial blue moon that a ball ought to be able to do that sort of thing. If the groundsman who prepared the wicket was zealous and untiring and did his work

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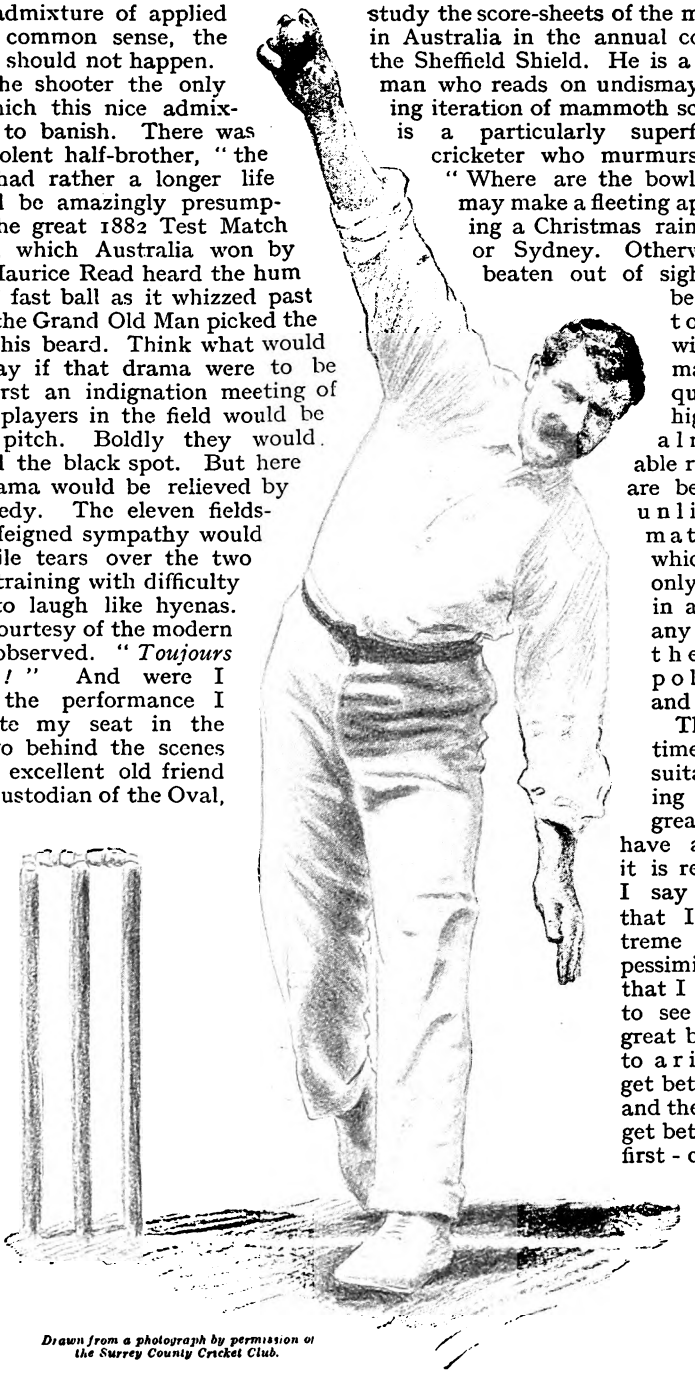
with a nice admixture of applied science and common sense, the wicked thing should not happen.

Nor was the shooter the only evil fiend which this nice admixture tended to banish. There was its more insolent half-brother, "the riser." He had rather a longer life and he could be amazingly presumptuous. In the great 1882 Test Match at the Oval, which Australia won by seven runs, Maurice Read heard the hum of "Spoff's" fast ball as it whizzed past his ear, and the Grand Old Man picked the bails out of his beard. Think what would happen to-day if that drama were to be revived! First an indignation meeting of the thirteen players in the field would be held on the pitch. Boldly they would cluster round the black spot. But here the fierce drama would be relieved by a little comedy. The eleven fieldsmen in well-feigned sympathy would weep crocodile tears over the two batsmen, restraining with difficulty a tendency to laugh like hyenas. Thus is the courtesy of the modern cricket-field observed. "*Toujours la politesse!*" And were I present at the performance I should vacate my seat in the gallery and go behind the scenes to warn my excellent old friend Martin, the custodian of the Oval, that all was lost save honour, and that he had better slip away while the going was good and drop unostentatiously into the Thames over the Embankment at Vauxhall Bridge.



Drawn from a photograph by permission of the Surrey County Cricket Club.

TOM RICHARDSON.

"In four consecutive seasons for Surrey he took more than a thousand wickets, a feat that has never been equalled."

RESULT OF TOO-PERFECT WICKET.

IF anyone has at this time of day the least doubt as to the effect of the too-perfect wicket upon even the best of bowlers, let him year by year study the score-sheets of the matches played in Australia in the annual competition for the Sheffield Shield. He is a stout-hearted man who reads on undismayed the wearying iteration of mammoth scores. And he is a particularly superficially-minded cricketer who murmurs as he reads, "Where are the bowlers?" They may make a fleeting appearance during a Christmas rain at Melbourne or Sydney. Otherwise they are beaten out of sight. They are beaten by the too-perfect wicket, which makes the three-quarter-stump-high ball an almost invariable rule. And they are beaten by the unlimited time match system, which provides the only justification in any land or in any conditions of the Asquithian policy—"Wait and see!"

The present time is eminently suitable for making a list of the great bowlers who have appeared, and it is regretfully that I say so. I trust that I am the extreme reverse of a pessimist, but I own that I find it difficult to see how another great bowler is going to arise. Wickets get better and better, and they will possibly get better still. With first-class cricket, both in England and Australia, finance is the supreme consideration, and it is batting and not bowling which ninety-nine out of every hundred spectators pay their money to see. Also "century-itis" has become incurable. If

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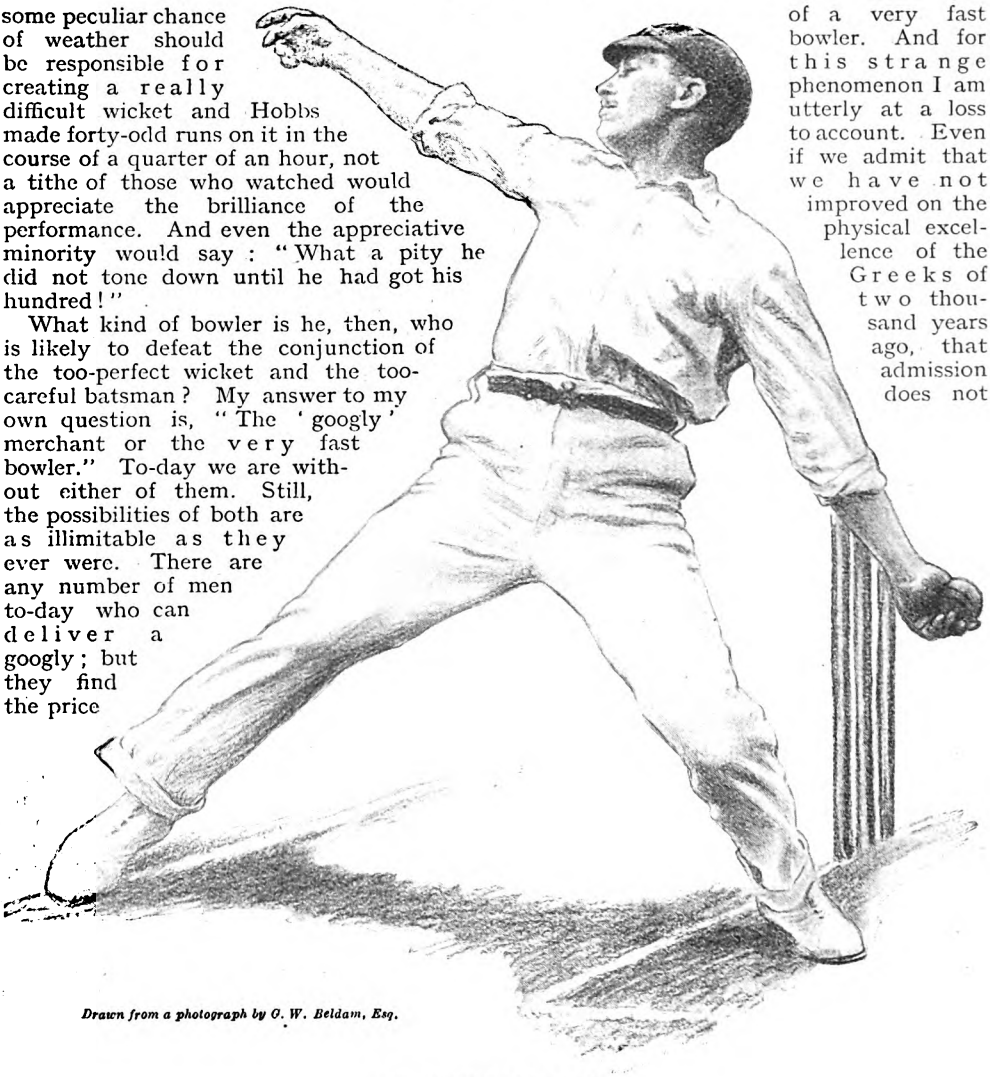
some peculiar chance of weather should be responsible for creating a really difficult wicket and Hobbs made forty-odd runs on it in the course of a quarter of an hour, not a tithe of those who watched would appreciate the brilliance of the performance. And even the appreciative minority would say: "What a pity he did not tone down until he had got his hundred!"

What kind of bowler is he, then, who is likely to defeat the conjunction of the too-perfect wicket and the too-careful batsman? My answer to my own question is, "The 'googly' merchant or the very fast bowler." To-day we are without either of them. Still, the possibilities of both are as illimitable as they ever were. There are any number of men to-day who can deliver a googly; but they find the price of a very fast bowler. And for this strange phenomenon I am utterly at a loss to account. Even if we admit that we have not improved on the physical excellence of the Greeks of two thousand years ago, that admission does not



Drawn from a photograph by G. W. Beldam, Esq.

WILFRED RHODES.

"The most perfect labour-saving device I have ever seen is the bowling action of Wilfred Rhodes."

prohibitive. More than any other ball, the googly has to be a perfect length in order to be dangerous. It is just what the modern batsman wants when it is not. The most wary of batsmen should be able to treat himself to a four off a short-pitched googly.

GREAT GOOGLY BOWLERS.

As every cricketer knows, B. J. T. Bosanquet invented the googly, but there have been only two great googly bowlers, Ernest Vogler and Aubrey Faulkner. Their day is over. Worst of all, there is no prospect of the reappearance account for the physical lapse in bowling in the last twenty years. In the 'eighties and the 'nineties there was not a first-class county eleven which did not own a really fast bowler of sorts. Since the War I have not seen a really fast one in county cricket, good, bad, or indifferent, and from careful inquiries I gather this person is not to be found on the village green either. I must perforce, then, confine myself to the "have beens."

I put Sydney Barnes very high indeed on my list. When Barnes appeared wickets were appreciably as good as they are now, and he had to bowl against great batsmen,

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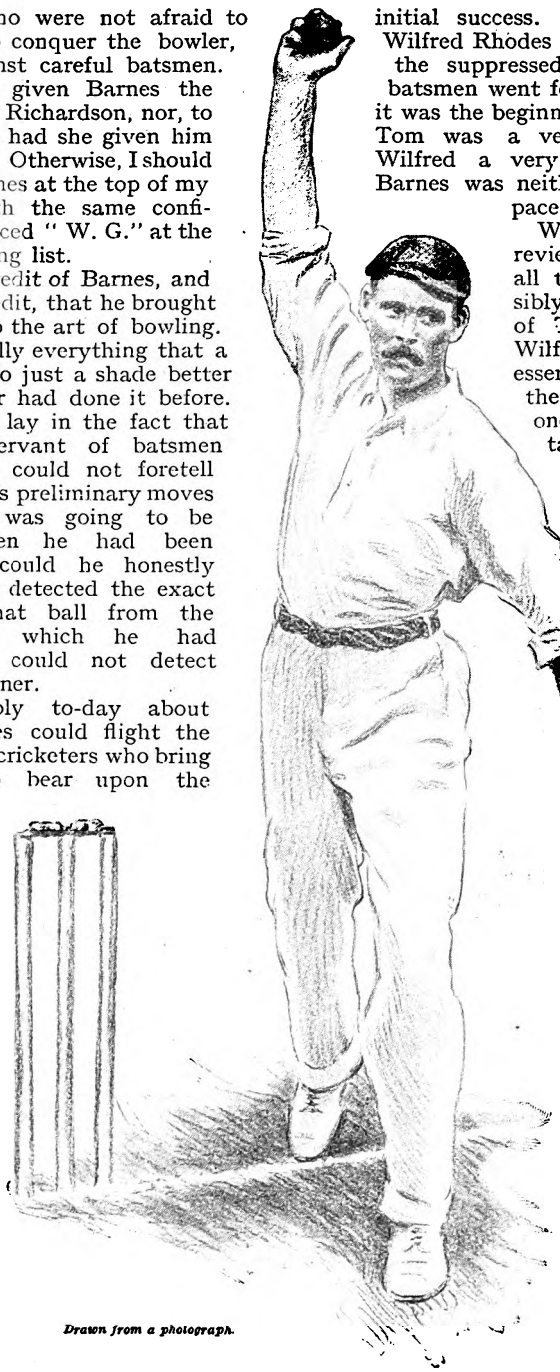
i.e., batsmen who were not afraid to try definitely to conquer the bowler, as well as against careful batsmen. Nature had not given Barnes the stamina of Tom Richardson, nor, to be quite candid, had she given him Tom's big heart. Otherwise, I should have placed Barnes at the top of my bowling list with the same confidence that I placed "W. G." at the top of my batting list.

It is to the credit of Barnes, and not to his discredit, that he brought no new factor to the art of bowling. He did practically everything that a bowler should do just a shade better than any bowler had done it before. His great asset lay in the fact that the most observant of batsmen opposed to him could not foretell from the bowler's preliminary moves what the ball was going to be like. Nor when he had been defeated by it could he honestly say that he had detected the exact difference in that ball from the preceding one which he had played. You could not detect Barnes's leg-turner.

We talk glibly to-day about flighting; Barnes could flight the ball. Scientific cricketers who bring mathematics to bear upon the practice of bowling know the importance of the parabola. An absolutely perfect camera used during, say, three consecutive overs bowled by Barnes would have given us records which might have helped us to understand the reason of his success when he defeated the great batsmen. Needless to say, his change of pace was accomplished without perceptible change of action. But Barnes needed nursing—very careful nursing. Also by temperament he was largely dependent for effectiveness upon initial success. Tom Richardson and Wilfred Rhodes indulged themselves in the suppressed chuckle when the batsmen went for them; they knew it was the beginning of the end. And Tom was a very fast bowler and Wilfred a very slow one. Sydney Barnes was neither; he was medium pace.



Drawn from a photograph.

SYDNEY BARNES.

"He would not fail on the big occasion."

When you try to pass in review the great bowlers of all time, you cannot possibly escape consideration of Tom Richardson and Wilfred Rhodes. It is essential ere you confer the title "great" on any one person in any undertaking that he should have proved himself great during some considerable period of time. Applying that maxim to the cricket-field, you cannot justly speak of Henry Martyn as one of the greatest of wicket-keepers. He had too short a career. And yet during that brief career I myself saw Martyn do feats of wicket-keeping which I deliberately define as amazing. The same reason precludes me from putting Frank Foster in the list of the world's greatest bowlers.

Foster, like George Hirst, was a fast left-handed swinger; he swung both ways, and his in-swinger was a positive beast. His most difficult ball was more difficult to treat than George Hirst's most difficult, and yet I am not putting George Hirst in the inner circle of the elect. Hirst has modestly described himself as a county rather than a Test Match cricketer, and he

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came very near greatness in doing so. For surely a great man is he who knows his own limitations, unwise though he be in regard to his own reputation to admit them. (By the way, I would remark that George Hirst was perhaps the greatest county cricketer who has been seen or will be seen.) Still, whether we like it or not, we have the Test Match standard at the back of our heads as we talk about the great cricketer, be he batsman or bowler.

TOM RICHARDSON'S LONE HAND.

TOM RICHARDSON so often played a lone hand, and superbly he played it. And Tom was a county cricketer as well as a Test Match cricketer. It may be remembered that in four consecutive seasons for Surrey he took more than a thousand wickets, a feat that has never been equalled. And when you remember that he bowled practically his fastest all the time, you are made to realize that cricket in any of its departments is, after all, a nice amalgam of skill and physique. The googly was unknown in Tom's day. Consequently, the only help he could get in a Test Match, where, by the way, he was the only fast bowler on the side, had to come from the slow leg-turner (he likes a fast wicket), and, far oftener than not, there was "no sich person" in the eleven. So it was Tom versus the enemy—a long, fierce frontal attack, a kind of Horatius on the Bridge, only with Horatius doing the attacking.

A famous Test Match was once played at Manchester, in which "Ranji" did all our batting and Tom all our bowling. Ranji conjured away until he had made over one hundred and fifty runs, and Tom bowled unchanged for three hours and ten minutes (we did not have in those Spartan times the tea interval for lady cricketers), and bowled his fastest too! The Tom-Ranji combination did not quite come off, but the Australians only just got home by ten runs. You could not break Tom's heart even if you stone-walled him, while if you went for him he could not, as I have said, control the smile that spread over his face. The experts will tell you rightly that Bill Lockwood could bowl a more difficult ball than Tom, and they are right. But Lockwood also wanted nursing. Tom would, so to speak, put any nurse in any pram and push it. He was always a forward child.

Rhodes, of course, has lasted far longer than Tom, and not mainly because he was a slow bowler and not a fast one. The most perfect labour-saving device I have ever seen is the bowling action of Wilfred Rhodes. It is so ridiculously easy. Only it is so ridiculously easy that a few hundred-thousand bowlers in the last thirty years have tried to copy it, and have tried in vain. There is not the least necessity for Rhodes to take out a patent for it. There is no fear of it being infringed. Rhodes, however, has had one advantage which in the case of a really great bowler I believe to be unique. He has never been compelled to bowl. When in his essentially undramatic way he made his dramatic entry into the Yorkshire eleven, there were several good bowlers in it, and there always have been several ever since. Not in an England side has the brunt of the bowling been made to fall on him. Yet call on Rhodes to perform on a "sticky dog" (when you can get one) and the modern big batsman is in as much trouble with him as the big batsman of thirty years ago used to be. Rhodes "puts 'em where he likes," and he knows where they ought to be put. He had the instinct of a veteran when he came out; he knew where to put them even then.

There is another unique feature about the bowling of Rhodes. His bowling was practically in abeyance for about fifteen years, and it may be, had he been an amateur, he would not have bowled at all at that time. In an evil hour he learnt to bat, with the result that he was promoted from number eleven on the Yorkshire batting list to number one on the England list. When Hobbs and others came along Rhodes was wanted to bowl again. He complied, and at the age of fifty or so stood once more at the top of the bowling list. Here again the experts make the same comparison between Peel and Rhodes as they made between Lockwood and Richardson. To Peel they gave the credit of bowling the more difficult ball. I can only retort: "He laughs loudest who laughs last!"

We are beginning to get at what we want by the processes of elimination and exhaustion. I do not stop to mention George Lohmann, A. G. Steel, Old Jack Hearne, while Shaw, Morley, Tom Emmett, etc., belong to the fairy-tale period. Also I even put ruthlessly out of the running the great "Spoff," Charlie Turner, Hughie Trumble, while fast bowlers will rise in their graves in resentment if I give the Australian Jones preference over them.

AGE OF GREAT BOWLERS.

IT is, I repeat, the period during the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century to which I look to find my great bowlers. I do not think I shall be asked to allow any post-War products to sit in the seats of the mighty. The natural, yet desirable, wave of optimism which happily pervaded the cricket-field when the game went on again subsequent to the great upheaval strove to carry Maurice Tate on its crest. That he was the best of

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them, easily the best, I frankly and gladly admit, but I was always unfortunately sure that his action was not, and could not be, the action of a laster. It did not display the happy and healthy energy of a Tom Richardson or the no-energy-at-all of a Wilfred Rhodes. Even if you had conscripted Tate and made him do four-fifths of his soldiering at physical drill, I doubt if you would have so lubricated his joints and loosened his muscles as to make you think the machine was working because it could not help working.

It comes, then, to this: The passport for the entrance of a bowler into the land of great of all time must bear on its visa the words, "Perennially fit and always available." A lot of bowlers may get as far as "Ellis Island" unchecked and revel there for a while in its doubtful notoriety. Only those whose papers bear the special label will get into the land, not of promise, but of recognized performance. I would try hard to get Sydney Barnes, as it were, out of pawn and pass him on even if I had to forge his ticket. He would not fail me on the big occasion, and we know that it is the big occasion that counts. But as I have been at great pains to make my own weapons, I must be content to be hoist with my own petard. I wave him a sorrowful good-bye and I go on in the humble capacity of courier with Wilfred Rhodes and Tom Richardson.

FINAL CHOICE.

SO I have reduced my candidates to two, and if I am asked for the supreme test of the pluck of my opinions I must laconically reply: "Tom." Then, no doubt, I shall be put into the witness-box and subjected to severe cross-examination. "D'you tell m'Lud and the members of the jury that as a bowling artist Tom Richardson should rank above Wilfred Rhodes?" I decline answer and throw myself on the Bench for protection, claiming that this is not cross-examination in the legal sense of the term, but introduction of new matter. The Bench upholds my objection, and all the reply my cross-examiner gets is: "That, everything and everybody considered, Tom was the more constant, and consequently the greater, bowling force." Swells as well as rabbits were by him discomfited on good wickets and slaughtered by him on bad ones.

Thus my final answer to the problem I have set myself to solve is Tom Richardson. I shall not get a jury of experts to agree with me, or at any rate of those who rank in the public estimation as experts. But the end is not now and the decision of the supreme and final Court of Appeal has not yet been invoked. The uncomfortable but inexorable claims of Anno Domini will not allow me to hear the final decision. I can only look to "Father Time" to protect my reputation.

ACROSTICS.

OUR thirty-ninth series of acrostics begins with No. 181, printed below, and will run for four months. Prizes to the value of twelve guineas will be awarded to the most successful solvers.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 181.

FISH-TAILED damsel with a comb,
Mighty monarch of the foam.

1. Of a molehill do not make it.
   Rhymes with fountain. High, I take it.
2. Did with first dress problem grapple,
   And is blamed for Adam's apple.
3. Harsh this file, and grating, very,
   Good united to a berry.
4. Most attractive, I admit,
   Even iron flies to it.
5. If from friends you must be parted,
   Bid them this in tones warm-hearted.
6. Best when to 'ts model nearest,
   Flattery in form sincerest.
7. Little hollow in some faces,
   Gives a smiler added graces.

BOODLEBAR.

Answers to Acrostic No. 181 *should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor,* THE STRAND MAGAZINE, *Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on August* 10*th. They must be written on half-sheets of notepaper, or on cards; at the foot of the solution must appear the solver's pseudonym, which must consist of one word only. Nothing else must be written on the same paper. Flimsy paper should not be used.*

To every light one alternative answer may be sent, provided that it is written at the side.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 180.

1. T	or	P
2. H	ov	E
3. A	llerio	N
4. C	upi	D
5. K	in	E
6. E	ri	N
7. R	hinodo	N
8. A	inta	I
9. Y	phu	S

NOTES.—Light 1. Corstorphine Hill, Edinburgh. 2. Verb, past tense; hove in sight; Kipling, The Five Nations, Sussex, the last line. 3. In heraldry, eagle either with or without feet. 4. Emerson, Poems of 1847, The Initial Love. 5. Pharaoh's dream. 6. Anagrams: Erin, lad—Ireland. 7. Rhino, cash; don, fellow of a college; rhinodon, shark. 8. Maintain; Tain, the town in Scotland; laver, aver. 9. Sisyphus. Sis, a sweetheart.

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"THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES"

A Great "BULLDOG DRUMMOND" Serial

By

"SAPPER" (H. C. McNEILE)

Illustrated by
J. DEWAR MILLS

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH WE HAVE A REHEARSAL.

I THINK my main feeling was one of intense curiosity. There was no light in the hall, but a faint lessening of the general darkness marked the door. For a time nothing happened, then something white appeared in the opening, and the room was flooded with light.

The woman Irma was standing there clad in the same white garment she had worn the preceding night. Behind her hovered Paul—his face more saturnine than ever, but it was on her that all our attention was concentrated. In her hands she held some largish object which was covered with a silken cloth, and after a while she advanced to the altar-stone and placed it there reverently. Then she removed the wrap, and I saw that it was a full-size plaster cast of a man's head.

"Dashed if it isn't our late lamented Carl," muttered Darrell.

The woman took no notice, she was staring intently at the cast. Once or twice her lips moved, but I heard no words, and for a time her hands were clasped in front of her as if in prayer. Then quite suddenly she turned her back on the altar and began to speak.

"A few months ago," she said, "I stood beside the wreckage of Wilmot's giant airship, and over the charred body of my man I swore an oath. That oath will be finally fulfilled to-night."

Her voice was quiet and conversational.

"But for an accident last night, a mistake on the part of one of my servants, I should not have sent you three the note I did. But Pedro, whom you have doubtless seen, killed a man at Stonehenge, and that necessitated a hastening in my plans.

"But for that accident, I might—in fact I think I would have given you one further clue. And yet I do not know; the game in very truth had begun to pall since Drummond died. You were only the puppies that followed your master. He was the one I wanted—not you. However, I thought that Phyllis should have you with her as she cannot have her husband. As yet she does not know that you are here; she does not even know her husband is dead. That she shall learn later—just before the end."

She paused, and I saw that Darrell was moistening his lips with his tongue, and that Jerningham's face was white. There was something far more terrifying in this calm, matter-of-fact voice than if she had ranted and raved.

"The Friar's Heel," she remarked. "You solved that quicker than I thought you would. And here you are. This gentleman has doubtless already told you that these stones form a model of Stonehenge. And you wonder why I should have taken so much trouble. I will tell you.

"Revenge is sweet, but to taste of its joys to the utmost, to extract from it the last drop of satisfaction, it must be as carefully planned as any other entertainment. That is why I regret so bitterly that it was Drummond himself who died at the Mere. I would far sooner have had him here; because he has escaped the supreme thing I had planned for him."

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She fell silent for a while, staring at the plaster cast, and I saw Darrell's anxious eyes roving round the room. They met mine for a moment, and he shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

Feverishly I stared around. Death, unless Drummond intervened. I looked up at the roof, remembering the sailor of the night before—but this time it was empty.

" It has not been very easy, Darrell." She was speaking again. " My servants have blundered ; mistakes have been made. But from the moment she fell into my hands the final issue has never been in doubt. I have played with her at times, letting her think that she would be free if you found her, and she, stupid little fool, has believed me. Free ! " She laughed.

" *Carissima,*" said the man called Paul, " is it wise to delay ? All has gone so well up to now, and I fear something may happen."

" What can happen ? " she said, calmly. " Who can interrupt us ? The time has passed when there was danger of surprise."

" For God's sake get on with it, woman," said Jerningham, harshly.

" The essence of satisfactory revenge, my friend," she remarked, " is not to hurry. The night is yet young."

With brooding eyes she stared in front of her.

" We will rehearse it once, Paul. I am in the mood. Turn out the lights."

" *Carissima,*" he protested, " is it wise ? "

" Turn out the lights," she said, curtly, and with a muttered oath he obeyed.

" I am in a strange mood to-night." Her voice—low and throbbing—came to us out of the darkness. " It is true that I have rehearsed it before, that I know exactly every effect—but I would postpone it awhile. Besides, it may be that you, who will watch the real performance, can suggest something at the rehearsal. Think well, you watchers ; use your imagination, for only thus will you appreciate my plan.

" Night. Darkness such as this. Around us on the grass a multitude who wait."

I sat up stiffly. Was it imagination or had something passed close to my chair ?

" They wait in silence, whispering, perhaps, amongst themselves of what is about to happen. They have seen it before—many times, but the mystery of what they are about to see and the wonder of it never palls.

" Darkness—and then in the east the faint light that comes before the dawn. Look ! "

It was clever—damnably clever. How the lights had been arranged to give the effect I cannot say, but at the end of the room behind the Friar's Heel there came a faint luminosity.

I couldn't help it. I was fascinated in spite of myself. My reason told me that all these elaborate preparations were nothing more nor less than the preliminaries to cold-blooded murder. I remember that I found myself thinking what a marvellous stage effect it would be.

Gradually the light behind the Friar's Heel increased, and then the woman began to sing. Her voice was small but true, and she sang in a tongue I did not know. It was a wild barbaric thing that sounded like one of those bizarre Magyar folk-songs, and the effect was incredible. The light grew brighter : her song wilder and more triumphant. And then suddenly she ceased.

" It comes," she cried. " The God comes. And as the first rays fall on the slaughter-stone, and the woman who lies there, the sacrifice is made."

OUT of the lessening darkness came a rim of golden light. It appeared behind the Friar's Heel, and gradually grew larger and larger, even as the sun appears above the horizon.

" The shadows shorten," she whispered. " Soon they will reach the slaughter-stone and pass it by. This time there is no victim—but next. . . . My God ! What's that ? "

Her voice rose to a sudden shrill cry, and for a while we all stared stupidly. For now the slaughter-stone was bathed in light, and on its smooth surface was a gruesome object. One end was red with dried up blood, and the other had a nail.

The man called Paul moved slowly towards it.

" It's a man's finger," he muttered, and his voice was shaking.

" A man's finger ? " repeated the woman. " But how did it get there ? How did it get there ? " she screamed. " How did it get there, you fool ? "

And Paul could give no answer.

" A man's finger ? " she said once more, and glancing at her I saw that every drop of blood had drained from her face. " Where is Grant ? "

" Grant ? " said Paul, stupidly. " Why do you want Grant ? "

" Drummond shot his finger off," she answered. " In the room below the Mere. Get him. Get him, you wretched fool, at once."

" But will you be all right ? " he began, and again from behind me came the throaty chuckle. " Great Scott ! the butterfly man."

I turned round. Sure enough there was Toby Sinclair, powerless in the hands of the negro. The mystery of the finger was explained.

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"Damn you!" he cried, "this is an outrage."

"Put him in a seat, Pedro," said the woman, and Toby was forced into the chair next to mine.

"If it isn't Mr. Seymour," he fumed, angrily. "Are these people mad? Is this place a lunatic asylum?"

He subsided into angry mutterings.

"Get Grant," said the woman, and Paul left the room.

She stood motionless, leaning against the altar-stone whilst that damnable nigger shambled round the room and then disappeared again. Toby Sinclair still continued to curse audibly, and the other three stared in front of them with eyes bright with anticipation.

The door opened and Paul came in, followed by the man with the damaged hand.

"Grant," said the woman, quietly, "is that your finger?"

He gave a violent start; then he picked it up with a trembling hand.

"It is," he muttered foolishly. "At least, I—I think it is, it must be."

"Do you recognize any of these men?" she went on.

"I recognize those three," he stammered, and Darrell nodded pleasantly.

"A little morning exercise by the waters of the Mere," he remarked.

"And what of the others?" she said.

He looked at Toby and me, and shook his head.

"I've seen them," he said. "At Amesbury. And I thought"—he looked sideways at Paul—"I thought—— The boss," he went on sullenly, "said that I was to say nothing about them."

For a moment she stared at Paul, with a look of such concentrated cold fury that I almost felt sorry for the man.

The man with the damaged hand had suddenly come very close to me and was peering into my face. Then with a quick movement he seized my moustache and tore it off.

"God in Heaven!" he muttered, "it's one of them. One of the three that were drowned."

A dead silence settled on the room, which was at last broken by Toby.

"What about *Opsiphanes syme?*" he burbled, genially.

Another dead silence, broken this time by the woman.

"So Drummond is not dead!" she said, softly. "How very interesting!"

"I seem to recall," drawled Jerningham, pleasantly, "in those dear days of long ago, that our lamented friend whose repulsive visage adorns the altar had frequent necessity to remark the same thing."

And then Paul spoke with sudden fear in his voice.

"It's a trap. An obvious trap. He's probably got the police with him."

"Go out, Grant," said the woman, "and mount guard again. Paul—fetch Phyllis."

For a moment or two he seemed on the point of arguing with her; then he thought better of it and both of them left the room.

"All of you except Drummond." She was talking half to herself. "Helpless; at my mercy."

A triumphant smile was on her lips, and, as it seemed to me, with justice. It exactly expressed the situation, and now that the momentary excitement of the finger episode had worn off I began to feel gloomier than ever.

I CAME out of my reverie to find Darrell's eyes fixed on me.

"Learnt that tune yet, Dixon?" he said.

Toby Sinclair was humming the Froth-Blowers' Anthem, and I nodded. I was free now to give Drummond away, but what earthly good it was going to be, Heaven alone knew.

"A new recruit, dear Irma," went on Darrell. "You will be pleased to know that it was he who solved most of your clues."

She turned her strange brooding eyes on me. "How did you get out of the Mere?" she asked, curiously.

"A little substitution," I remarked. "The gentleman you left below arrived too soon, and then I sat on the water handle by mistake."

"I am glad," she said. "The audience will now be complete."

"Think so?" said Jerningham, mockingly. "One seat, and a rather important one, still remains to be occupied."

"It is possible that it may remain unoccupied," she said, enigmatically. "Good evening, Phyllis. Your husband's friends have all arrived, as you see."

Mrs. Drummond stared round with a wan little smile.

"Hullo, chaps!" she said. "Where's Hugh?"

"The Lord knows, Phyllis," answered Darrell. "We don't."

"He will come," said Mrs. Drummond, calmly. "Don't worry."

"You think so," answered Irma. "Good. And, anyway, why should you worry? Whether he comes, or whether he doesn't, the result so far as you are concerned will be the same. In fact, I am not sure that my revenge would not be all the sweeter if he didn't come—until too late—knowing that at last he had failed you."

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"May I remind you once again of the number of times we have heard remarks of a similar nature from your late lamented—er—husband?" said Jerningham, with a yawn.

"And may I remind you," she answered, "of my original little verse to Drummond concerning the Female of the Species? I shall wait a little, and then we will proceed. Should he come in the interval, I shall be delighted for him to participate in our little ceremony. He will hear you screaming for help inside here—and then——"

Her voice rose; her breast heaved; she was tasting of her triumph in advance.

"Why do we delay, dear one?" said Paul, anxiously. "Let us be done with it now, and leave him to find what he will find."

But she shook her head.

I THOUGHT furiously; every moment gained might be an advantage.

"How is he to know anything about it?" I said. "If he is where I last saw him, he is in Amesbury."

She looked at me thoughtfully.

"Is he also disguised like you and Sinclair?"

"He is," I said, shortly. "He has a large black beard . . ."

"You fool," howled Sinclair. "You damned treacherous fool. My God! We're done."

I stared at him stupidly, and a sudden deadly sick feeling came over me.

"But," I stammered, "I thought——"

"I could kill you where you sit, you cur," went on Sinclair, icily, "if only I had my hands free."

"You seem to have said the wrong thing, Mr. Dixon," said Irma, pleasantly. "So dear Hugh is disguised in a large black beard, is he? We will certainly wait, Paul, until he arrives. I couldn't bear to miss him in a black beard."

"He had a scheme," said Sinclair, furiously, to the other three. "An absolute winner. But everything depended on his disguise. You fool, Dixon; you fool."

"Shut up, Toby," said Mrs. Drummond, peremptorily. "I'm sure Mr. Dixon didn't mean to do any harm, and, anyway"—she turned to me—"thank you a hundred times for all you've been through on my behalf."

And have you any idea if our friend is coming soon?" pursued Irma, sweetly. "Or shall we send a note to Amesbury, addressed to Mr. Blackbeard?"

"You needn't worry," said Sinclair, sullenly. "He's coming all right."

He glowered vindictively at me, and I glowered back at him

"I'm damned sorry," I said, suddenly. "But for God's sake don't think it was treachery."

For a moment no one spoke. Then:—

"Sorry I said that," said Toby, gruffly. "Withdraw it and all that sort of rot."

Silence fell again; the only movement was Paul's restless fidgeting. The woman still leaned gracefully against the altar-stone. Mrs. Drummond sat motionless, staring at the door.

"He will probably be coming soon, Paul," said Irma, suddenly. "And it would be better not to give him any warning. Gag them."

"What about the girl?" he said.

"Gag her as well, and put her in the vacant chair for a time."

"Don't touch me, you foul swine," said Mrs. Drummond, coldly. "I will go there."

"And then, when dear Hugh comes," said Irma, "he shall take your place, Phyllis. Whilst you will be placed elsewhere."

She clenched her hands, and for a moment the feverish glitter returned to her eyes. Then she grew calm again.

"Now turn out all the lights except the one at the end."

And so for perhaps ten minutes we sat there waiting. Once I heard Pedro's throaty chuckle, that seemed to come from the passage leading to the garage; and once I thought I heard the sound of a car on the road outside. Otherwise the silence was absolute.

My arm was throbbing abominably. My thoughts began to wander.

I was back in my club, and the woman Irma was the wine steward. It was absurd that I couldn't get a drink before eleven o'clock in the morning in my own club. A fatuous war-time regulation that should be repealed. I'd write to my M.P. about it. Everybody ought to write to his M.P. about it. Here was that doddering ass, old Axminster, coming in. Thought he owned the place because he was a Peer. What was he saying? I listened—and suddenly my thoughts ceased to wander.

It wasn't Axminster; it was the man with the damaged hand.

"A big bloke with a black beard is dodging through the bushes towards the house," he said. "What are we to do?"

The woman stretched out her arms ecstatically.

"Let him come," she cried, triumphantly. "Pedro!"

Came another throaty chuckle from behind me.

"Come into the room after him, Pedro. Don't let him see you. Then I leave him to you. But don't kill him."

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CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE CURTAIN RINGS DOWN.

AS long as I live I shall never forget the tension of the next few minutes. The light was so dim that the faces of the others were only blurs. Paul had joined the woman, and they were standing side by side against the altar-stone. The door in the hall was ajar, and the hall itself was in darkness.

But at last the period of waiting was over. Drummond's voice could be heard in the hall.

" Very little light in this house."

The woman by the altar stiffened.

" His voice," she said, exultingly. " Drummond at last."

And then, or was it my imagination, there seemed to come a funny sort of hissing noise from the hall. Had the negro got him already ? But no, he was speaking again.

" I am a police inspector, and I wish to see the lady of the house on a very important matter."

The door opened, and there stood Drummond. I could just see his black beard, but it wasn't at him that I looked for long. He took a couple of steps into the room, and like a shadow the negro slipped in—dodging behind the curtain. I heard hoarse gurgling noises coming from the others as they strove to warn him, but Paul had done his work too well.

With a swift movement he stepped back and shut the door, so that Pedro was not more than a yard from him.

" Good evening, Inspector. Your voice is very familiar."

" A little ruse, my poppet," said Drummond, pleasantly, " for getting into the august presence. May I say that I have a revolver in my hand, in case you can't see it in this light ? And will you and your gentleman friend put your hands up ? I've dealt with one of your myrmidons outside in the hall, and my temper is a bit ragged."

With a faint smile the woman raised her hands, and Paul followed suit.

" How are you, *mon ami ?* " she said. " We only required you to complete the family circle. In fact, I was desolated when I thought you'd succumbed at the Mere."

I worked madly at the handkerchief with my jaws. Why didn't he come farther into the room ? At any second the negro might spring on him.

" And what is this ridiculous entertainment ? " he asked.

" Specially staged for you, Hugh," she answered.

" I'm sorry you've wasted your time," he said, shortly. " A truce to this fooling. I've had enough of it. You and the swine with you are for it now."

" Are we ? " she mocked.

" Yes—you are. Come here, you swab. I don't know your name, and I don't want to, but hump yourself."

" And if I refuse ? " said Paul, easily.

" I'll plug you where you stand," answered Drummond. " I don't know how my wife and friends are secured, but set them free. And no monkey tricks."

And then, with a superhuman effort, I got the handkerchief half off my mouth.

" Look out behind," I croaked, and even as I spoke the gleaming white teeth of the negro showed over his shoulder. That was all I could see at that distance, but I could hear.

THERE came a startled grunt from Drummond, that foul throaty chuckle from the black man, and the fight commenced. And what a fight it was in the semi-darkness ! Dimly I could see them swaying to and fro, each man putting forward every atom of strength he possessed, whilst Irma swayed backwards and forwards in her excitement and the man Paul went towards the struggling pair in case he was wanted.

" Leave them, Paul," she cried, tensely. " Let Drummond have his last fight."

And then Darrell got his gag free.

" Go it, Hugh ; go it, old man," he shouted.

I heard someone croaking hoarse sounds of encouragement, and suddenly realized it was myself. And then gradually the sounds ceased, and my mouth got strangely dry. For Drummond was losing.

From a great distance I heard Darrell muttering " My God ! " over and over again to himself, and from somewhere else came pitiful little muffled cries as Mrs. Drummond realized the ghastly truth. Her husband was losing.

It was impossible to see the details, but of the main broad fact there was no doubt. At long last Drummond had met his match. The nigger's chuckles were ceaseless and triumphant, though Drummond fought mute. But slowly and inexorably he was being worn down. And then step by step the black man forced him towards the chair where his wife was sitting.

" Take Phyllis out, Paul," cried Irma, suddenly. " Take her out."

Foot by foot, faster and faster the pair swayed towards the empty seat. Drummond was weakening obviously, and suddenly with a groan he gave in and crumpled. And then in a couple of seconds it was over. He was flung into the chair, and with a click the steel bars closed over his wrists. He

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was a prisoner, the family circle was complete.

With a heart-broken little cry his wife, who had torn off her gag, flung her arms around him and kissed him.

"Darling boy!" she cried in an agony; then abruptly she straightened up and stood facing her enemy. And if her voice when she spoke was not quite steady, who could be surprised?

"You foul devil!" she said. "Get it over quickly."

And Pedro's evil chuckle was the only answer. I glanced at Irma, and for the time she was beyond speech. Never have I seen such utter and complete triumph expressed on any human being's face; she was in an ecstasy. Standing in front of the bust of Peterson, she was crooning to it in a sort of frenzy. The madness was on her again.

"My love, my king, he has been beaten. Do you realize it, my adored one? Drummond has been beaten. You are here, my Carl; your spirit is here. Do you see him—the man who killed you—powerless in my hands?"

Gradually she grew calmer, and at length Paul spoke.

"There is no reason for more delay now, *carissima*," he said, urgently. "Let us finish."

She stared at him broodingly.

"Finish—yes. All will be finished soon, Paul. But for a few minutes I will enjoy my triumph. Then we will stage our play."

She looked at each of us in turn—a look of mingled triumph and contempt.

"Ungag them, Paul; and, Pedro—you attend to the white woman should she give trouble."

SHE waited till Paul had obeyed her—gloating over us, and the full realization of our position came sweeping over me. Great though the odds against him had been, some vestige of hope had remained while Drummond was still free. Now our last chance had gone; we were finished—outwitted by this woman. And though nothing could have been more utterly futile and fatuous than Drummond's behaviour, I felt terribly sorry for him.

Still breathing heavily after his fight, he sat there with his chin sunk on his chest, looking the picture of despondency.

All the fight seemed to have gone out of him: he was broken. And when I looked at the others they seemed broken, too—stunned with the incredible thing that had happened. That Drummond, the invincible, should have met his match at last—should be sitting there as a helpless prisoner—had shattered them.

"All is ready," said Paul. "Let us start."

"Yes; we will start. But, as this is our last meeting, are there any little points you would like cleared up or explained? You, my dear Drummond, seem strangely silent. It's not surprising, I admit; complete defeat is always unpleasant. But, honestly, I can't congratulate you on your handling of the show. And now—it is over."

She fell silent, that strange brooding look on her face, until at length Paul went up to her.

"For Heaven's sake, *carissima*," he said, urgently, "do not let us delay any longer. I tell you I fear a trap."

"Why do you fear a trap?" she demanded.

"They have come into our power too easily," he said, doggedly. "They have walked in with their eyes open, it seems to me."

"All that matters is that they have walked in," she answered. "And now, whatever happens, they will never walk out again. Do you hear that, Drummond? I said—whatever happens."

"I hear," he said, sullenly.

"It matters not," she cried, triumphantly, "if a cordon of police surround the house; it matters not if they batter at the doors—they will be too late. Too late."

"But," stammered Paul, "how shall we get away?"

She waved him from her imperiously.

"Be silent; you bore me." Once more she turned to the plaster cast. "Do you realize, my Carl, what has happened? They are all here—all of them. Drummond and his wife are here; the others are here waiting to expiate their crime. Their lives for yours, my king; I have arranged that. Is it your will that I delay no longer?"

She stared at the bust as if seeking an answer, and somebody—I think it was Algy—gave a short, high-pitched laugh. Nerves were beginning to crack; only Mrs. Drummond still stood cool and disdainful, stroking her husband's hair.

Suddenly the wild futility of the whole thing came home to me, so that I writhed and tugged and cursed. Seven of us were going to be killed at the whim of a mad woman! Murdered in cold blood!

"I told you she meant to kill us," I shouted, "and you five damned idiots come walking into the most obvious trap that has ever been laid."

"Shut that man's mouth," said Irma, quietly, and for the second time Pedro's huge black hand crept round my throat—squeezing, throttling, so that half-choked I fell silent.

"We will begin," she said, suddenly. "Paul, get Phyllis."

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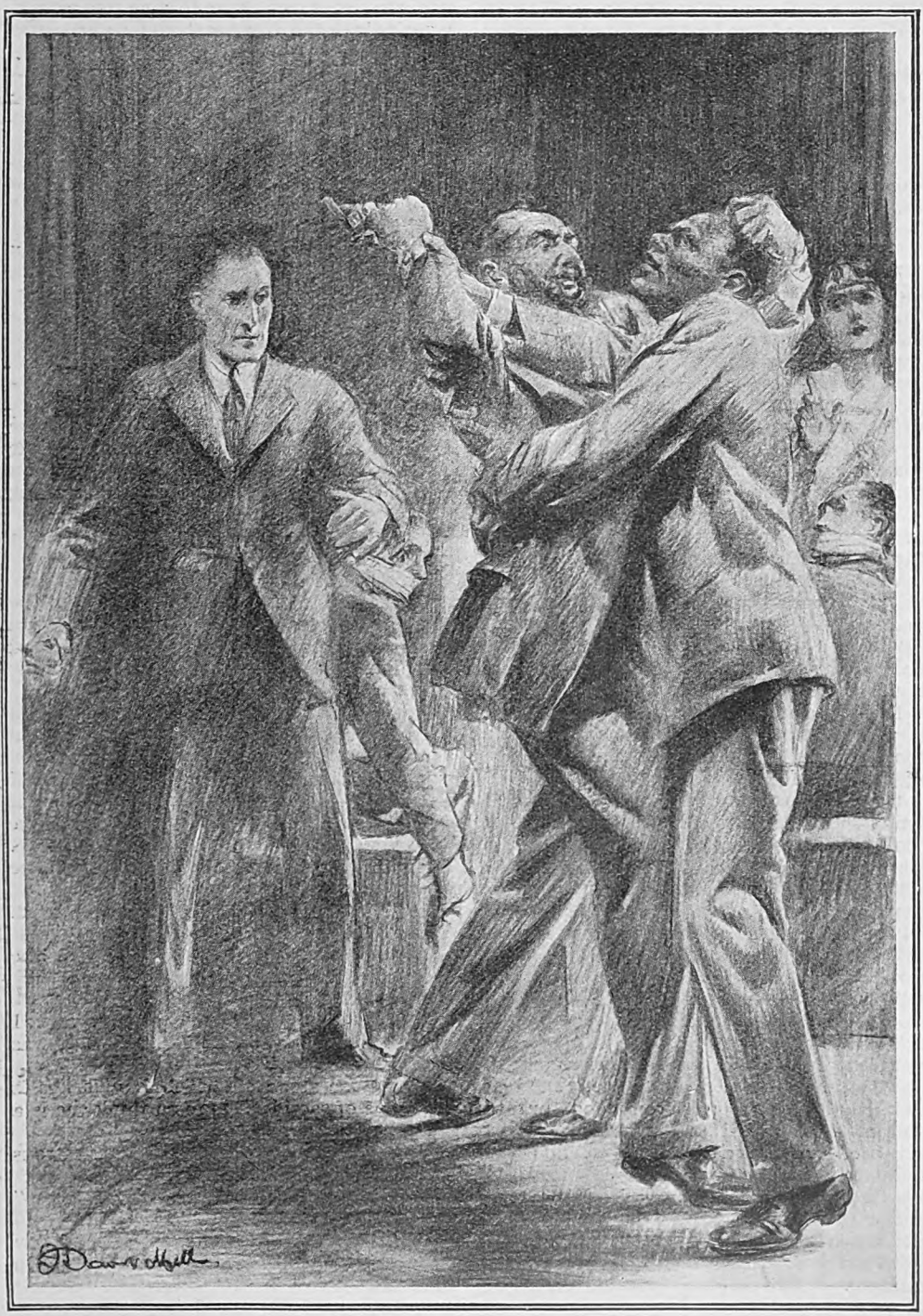

At long last Drummond had met his match. The nigger's chuckles were ceaseless and triumphant.

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With a little cry, Mrs. Drummond flung her arms round her husband's neck.

"Good-bye, my darling," she cried, kissing him again and again. But he was beyond speech, and at length the negro seized her and dragged her away.

"Let me go, you foul brute," she said, furiously, and Paul, who was standing by the stone of sacrifice, beckoned to her to come. Proudly, without faltering, she walked towards him.

"Lie down," he said, curtly.

And then for the first time I realized that there were ropes made fast to rings in the stone. She was going to be lashed down. She didn't struggle even when Pedro, chuckling in his excitement, helped to make her fast. And on her face was an expression of such unutterable contempt that it seemed to infuriate the other woman.

"You may sneer, my dear Phyllis," she stormed. "But look above you, you little fool; look above you."

With one accord we all looked up, and at the same moment a small light was turned on in the ceiling. And when he had seen what it illuminated, Ted Jerningham began to shout and bellow like a madman.

"Stop it, you devil!" he roared. "Let one of us go there instead of her. My God! Hugh! Do you see?"

But Drummond was still silent, and after a while Jerningham relapsed into silence too. And as for me, I was conscious only of a deadly feeling of nausea.

Hanging from a rafter was a huge, pointed knife. It was of an uncommon Oriental design, and it looked the most deadly weapon.

"Yes, Hugh—do you see?" cried Irma, mockingly. "Do you see what it is that hangs directly above your wife's heart? It has been tested, not once, but many times, and when I release the spring it will fall, Hugh. And it will fall straight."

And still Drummond sat silent and cowed.

"But I shall not release it yet; that I promise you. There is a little ceremony to be gone through before our finale. The rest of them have seen it, Drummond, but to you as my principal guest it will come as a surprise. And after it is over, and the knife that you see up there is buried in Phyllis's heart, your turn will come."

She was rocking to and fro in her mad excitement.

"Paul has arranged it," she cried, exultingly. "Clever Paul. Behind each one of you is enough explosive to shatter you to pieces. But Paul has so arranged it that even as Phyllis waits and waits for death to come—so will you all wait. You will see it creeping closer and closer, and be powerless to do anything to save yourselves. I shall light the fuse, and you will see the flame burning slowly towards this little box. And when it reaches that box—suddenly, with the speed of light, the flame will dart to the gun-cotton behind your backs. For the fuse that connects the gun-cotton to the box is of a different brand from the one I shall light. Paul knows all these things; Paul is clever."

AND now the madness was on her in earnest. She walked to and fro in front of the altar-stone, her arms outstretched, worshipping the plaster cast of Peterson.

"Great Heavens! man," shouted Darrell to Paul, "you can't let her go on. The woman is mad."

But he took no notice; his eyes were fixed on the woman, who had now become silent. She seemed to be listening to a voice we could not hear, and something told me that we were very near the end.

"Put out the lights, Paul," she said, gravely.

I took one last look round the room: at Mrs. Drummond, lying bound, with the black man gloating over her; at Irma, standing triumphant by the altar-stone; and finally at Drummond. And then the lights went out.

Once again we were plunged in darkness that could be felt, but this time it was not a rehearsal. In a few minutes that knife would fall from the ceiling, and the poor girl would be dead. And we should see it actually happen. The sweat poured off me in streams as the full horror of it came home. I scarcely thought of what was going to be the fate of the rest of us afterwards.

"A model of Stonehenge, Drummond. You have realized that?"

At last he seemed to have recovered the use of his tongue.

"Yes, I have realized that."

His voice was perfectly steady, and I wondered if even now he realized what was coming.

"And the stone on which Phyllis lies is the stone of sacrifice. Do you think she is a worthy offering?"

"Do you really mean to do this monstrous thing, Irma Peterson?" he asked.

"Should I have gone to all this trouble," she mocked, "if I didn't?"

"And yet, when on one occasion you asked me, I spared Carl's life. Do you remember?"

"Only to kill him later," she cried, fiercely. "Go on, Drummond; beg for her life. I'd like to hear you whining."

"You won't do that," he answered. "If I ask you to spare her, it is for a different

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reason altogether. It is to show that you have left in you some shred of humanity."

" As far as you are concerned, I have none," she said. " As I say, should I have done all this for nothing? Listen, Drummond.

" It was in Egypt, as I told you in my first letter, that the idea came to me. By the irony of fate, it was suggested to me by a man who knows you well, Drummond. You and dear Phyllis had been staying at the same house with him, and he was so interested to find out that I also knew you. He told me about this splendid game of hidden treasure, and it appeared that you had won. I asked him the rules, and he said they were exceedingly simple. Everything depended on having good clues: I trust that mine have been up to standard."

She paused, and no one spoke.

" From the game as you played it then to the game as you have played it now was but a short step. Preparation was necessary, it is true; but the main idea was the same. I would give you a hidden-treasure hunt, where the prize was not a box of cigarettes, but something a little more valuable. And I would leave you to think "—her voice rose suddenly—" you poor damned fool, that if you succeeded you would get the prize.

" However, of that later. Having made my preparations, the next thing was to obtain the prize. That proved easier than I expected. Twice, but for one of those little accidents which no one could foresee, Phyllis would have got into a special taxi in London—a taxi prepared by me. But I could afford to wait. For weeks you were watched, Drummond—and then you went to Pangbourne, where you began to realize that I was after you. And then came the opportunity. A hastily-scrawled note in your handwriting—Paul is an adept at that, and I had several specimens of your writing—and the thing was done.

" ' Bring the Bentley at once to Tidmarsh, old girl. A most amazing thing has happened.—H.' Do you remember the note, Phyllis? I don't blame you for falling into the trap; it said neither too much nor too little, that note. And so I got the prize at a trifling cost. It was naughty of you to hit him so hard, my dear, as I've told you before. Paul said it was a positively wicked blow."

Once again that mocking laugh rang through the room, but I hardly heard it. With every sense alert, I was listening to another sound—the sound of heavy breathing near me. Something was happening close by—but what? Then came a groan, and silence.

" What was that? Who groaned? " Her words came sharp and insistent.

" Who, indeed? " answered Drummond's voice. " Why don't you continue, Irma Peterson? We are waiting for the theatrical display."

" Pedro! Pedro! Is Drummond still in his chair? "

Came that same throaty chuckle, followed by Drummond's voice again:—

" Take your hands off me, you foul swab."

" It is well," she said, and there was relief in her voice. " I should not like a mistake to occur now. And with you, Drummond—one never knows."

" True," said he, " one never knows. Even now, Irma, there is time for you to change your mind. I warn you that it will be better for you if you do."

" Thank you a thousand times," she sneered. " Instead, however, of following your advice, we will begin. The sacrifice is ready; we have delayed enough."

Once more I became conscious of movement near me, and my pulses began to tingle.

" Just for the fraction of a second, Drummond, will you again see Phyllis alive; then the knife will fall."

THE faint light was beginning behind the Friar's Heel, in a couple of minutes it would be all over. Unless—unless—— My heart was pounding; my tongue was dry; was it the end, or were strange things taking place?

" The dawn," she cried. " You see the dawn, Drummond. Soon the sun will rise, the rays will creep nearer and nearer to Phyllis. And then—— See! The rim is already there. It is coming, Drummond; coming. Have you any last message, you poor damned fool, for her? If so, speak now, for my hand is on the lever of the knife."

" Just one," said Drummond, lightly, and to my amazement his voice did not come from the chair in which he was imprisoned. " Every beard is not false, but every nigger smells. That beard ain't false, dearie, and dis nigger don't smell. So I'm thinking there's something wrong somewhere."

There was a moment's dead silence, then she gave a little choking gasp. Came a streak of light as the knife shot down, a crash, and on the stone of sacrifice lay the bust of Carl Peterson, shattered in a hundred pieces.

For a while I couldn't grasp it. I stared stupidly at the woman who was cowering back against the altar-stone; at the crumpled figure of Paul lying on the ground close by me. And then I looked at the nigger, and he was grinning broadly.

" So it ain't poor dear Drummond in dat chair," he chuckled. " That is my very good friend John Perkins, and when you

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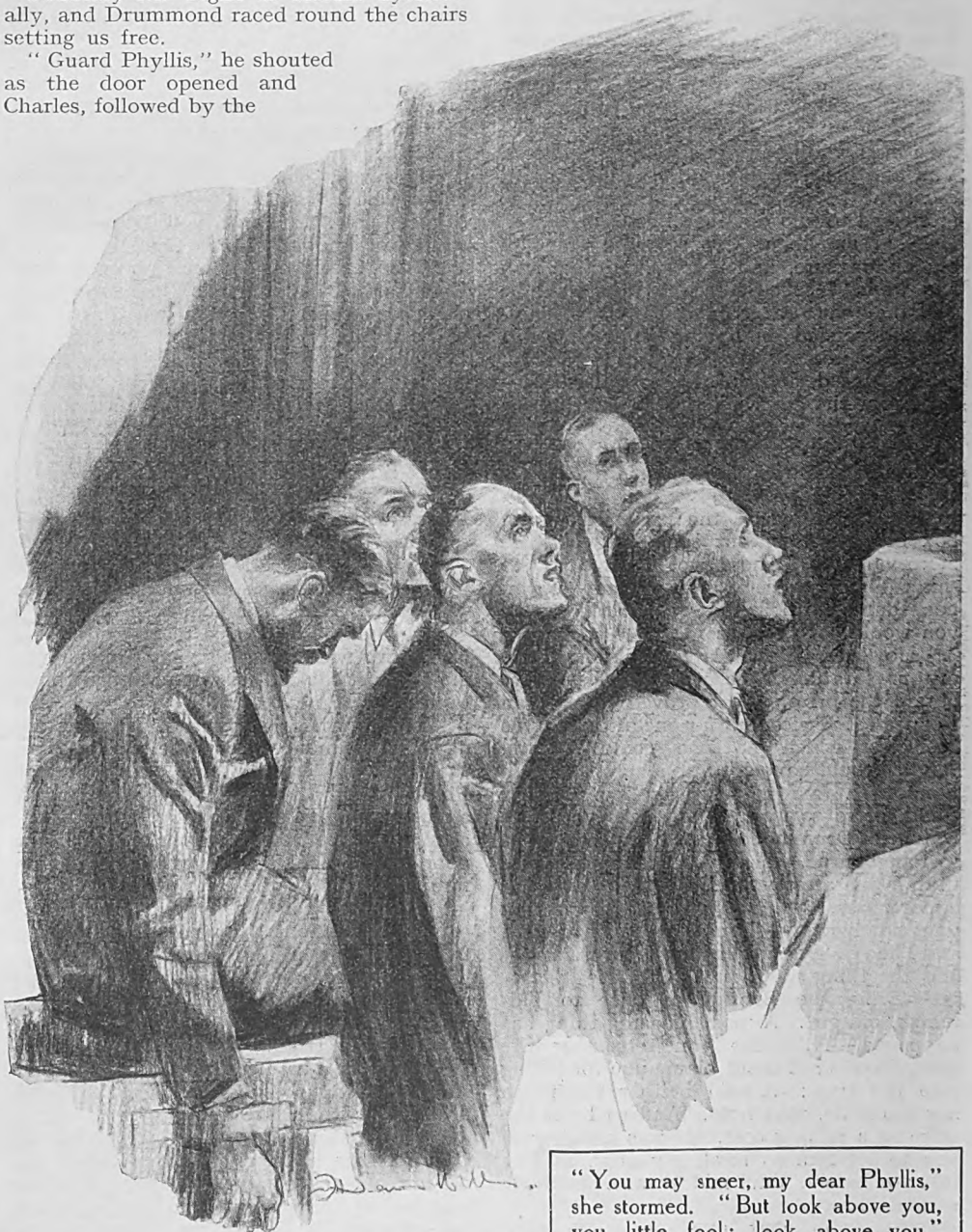
thought John was talking, it was really dis nigger what spoke, so you see you weren't quite as clever as you thought, my poppet."

Suddenly she began to scream hysterically, and Drummond raced round the chairs setting us free.

"Guard Phyllis," he shouted as the door opened and Charles, followed by the chauffeur, came rushing in. It lasted about five seconds—the scrap; but that five seconds was enough. For when it was over and we looked round for Irma she had gone. Whether there was some secret door which we didn't discover, or whether she fled through the passage into the garage, we shall never know. But from that day to this there has been no trace seen of her. And I don't even know the ultimate fate of the various men of the house-party. Having



"You may sneer, my dear Phyllis," she stormed. "But look above you, you little fool; look above you."

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"You'll probably curse my neck off, chaps," he said, "for keeping you in the dark. But, honestly, it seemed the only way. It was touch and go, mark you—especially for Phyllis, and that was where the difficulty came in!

"In the first place, I wasn't too sure that they really did think we'd been killed at the Mere. And so it became absolutely vital that I should not be caught. But how to arrange it, and at the same time lull her suspicions and make her think she'd got me, was the problem. Obviously by providing myself with a double, which is where dear old John came in. He acts for the movies, and he'd grown that awful fungus for a part he has to play shortly. When it is removed, however, he really does look rather like me; moreover, he's the same build. So off we set—me as a sailor, him as me—without the smell of an idea as to what we were going to slosh into down here.

"Then came an amazing piece of luck. We motored down—John and I—and we passed the house last night. There was, of course, nothing suspicious about it—nothing to mark it as the spot we wanted. Except one thing, and therein lay the luck. As we went past the drive another car coming towards us slowed up, evidently with the intention of turning in. And sitting beside the driver in the front seat was the gent called Paul. That settled it."

"Why?" I asked.

"You couldn't be expected to know," he answered, "but I should have thought old Toby's grey matter would have heaved to it, especially as he spotted the astounding likeness to the late lamented Lakington. Don't you remember the message Phyllis scrawled with her finger, in the blood at the back of her seat? LIKE LAK. It couldn't mean anything else, unless it was the most astounding coincidence. So we were a bit on the way, but not far. We'd found a house connected with them, but whether Phyllis was inside or not I hadn't an idea. However, being a bit of an adept at exploring houses at night, I intended to do so until you two bung-faced swabs went and made fools of yourselves at Stonehenge that afternoon.

"Never," he grinned, cheerfully, "in the course of a long and earnest career have I heard two people give themselves away so utterly and so often as Toby and Dixon did that afternoon. It was staggering, it was monumental. And the man they deliberately selected to be the recipient of their maidenly confidence was Paul himself. Beer—more beer—much more beer."

"Damn it, Hugh!" cried Sinclair.

"My dear lad," Drummond silenced him with a wave of his hand, "you were the finest example of congenital idiocy it has ever been my misfortune to witness. The stones of Stonehenge are little pebbles compared to the bricks you dropped, but I forgive you. I even forgive jolly old Dixon's scavenging propensities in waste-paper baskets. Such is my nature—beautiful, earnest, and pure. But you assuredly caused me a lot of trouble. I had to change my plans completely.

"Paul obviously suspected you; no man out of a lunatic asylum could possibly avoid doing so. And as I had no possible means of knowing that all he wanted to do was to get on with the job, I had to assume that he would pass on his suspicions to Irma, and proceed to rope the pair of you in. Time had become an urgent factor. So I wired Algy, and when he arrived I told him by letter what to do. He was to announce loudly that he proposed to go to the Friar's Heel by night, but as he valued his life he wasn't to do anything of the sort."

HE leaned back in his chair, and looked at me with twinkling eyes.

"You may be a damned idiot, Joe," he said, "but I looks towards you and I raise my glass. Had it remotely dawned on me that you were going there yourself, I'd have given you the same warning. But it didn't."

"You knew I was there?" I stammered.

"Laddie," he remarked, "hast ever listened to a vast herd of elephants crashing their way through primeval forest? Hast ever heard the scaly rhinoceros and young gambolling playfully on a shingly shore, whilst they assuage their thirst? Thus, and more so, was your progress that night. You were, and I say it advisedly, the most conspicuous object in the whole of Wiltshire."

He frowned suddenly.

"You know what we found there, the others don't. Some poor devil who looked like a clerk—stone-dead. What he was doing there we shall never know, but it was perfectly obvious that he had been mistaken for Algy. The nigger had blundered, and it was a blunder which might prove awkward. You heard them talking, Joe—Paul and Irma; but it didn't require that confirmation to see how the land lay. All along I had realized that Phyllis and I were the principal quarry. If she got you so much the better, but we came first. And what I was so terribly frightened of, as soon as I saw that body, was that Irma would get nervous and, believing I was already dead, would go back, finish off Phyllis straight away, and then clear out. I still had no definite scheme; I didn't even have a definite scheme after I'd functioned with

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the nigger. In fact, I didn't really intend to fight him at all.

"I suppose he must have smelt me or something; at any rate, he came for me. And by the Lord Harry, it was touch and go. However"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I pasted him good and hearty in the mazzard, and that was that. In fact, he is in an awkward predicament, that nigger. I dragged him into one of those disused sheds, and handcuffed him to a steel girder. Then I put his victim beside him. And he will find explanations a little difficult.

"The trouble was that all this had delayed me. I hadn't got a car, only a bicycle—and that house had to be explored at once. My hat! laddie," he said to me, "I didn't expect to find you as part of the furniture. How on earth did you get there?"

"On the luggage grid of their car," I said.

"The devil you did!" he grinned. "The devil you did! Joe—you are a worthy recruit, though when I saw you through the skylight I consigned you to the deepest pit of hell. But, thank Heaven! you didn't give away the fact that you'd seen me."

"I thought you were one of them," I said.

"I know you did, old boy," he laughed. "What we'd have done without your thoughts, during this show, I don't know. They have all been so inconceivably wide of the mark that they've been invaluable.

"The first alternative was to try to get you out of the house single-handed, Phyllis, but I dismissed that as impossible. I didn't know your room; the house was stiff with men, and—most important of all—that woman would have shot on sight.

"The second alternative was to get all the bunch into the house without arousing Irma's suspicions. And when I heard her reading the letter she was sending Algy, I realized we were getting on. John and Toby could be brought in at a suitable time, and there only remained the problem of what I was going to do. I confess I didn't think of it. John suggested the nigger. It was a risk, but it proved easier than I thought."

"Damn it, Hugh," cried Darrell, "why didn't you say who you were in the afternoon? You were alone with us, and if you'd set us free then we could have tackled the whole bunch."

"Because, Peter,' said Drummond, gravely, "it would have taken us some minutes to tackle them. It would have taken Irma half a second to kill Phyllis."

"At any rate," said Jerningham, "you might have let us know. Jove! old boy, I never want to go through twenty minutes like that again."

"I know, chaps—and I'm sorry. I'd have spared you that if I'd thought it safe. But then you would all of you have been acting, and I wanted the real thing. I knew that Dixon thought John was me, and would tell you so, too. And I wanted you all to carry on as if you thought so. The rest you know. It was easy for me to talk every time instead of John, with the room in semi-darkness as it was. And I think you'll admit we staged a damned good fight."

"When did you spot it, Phyllis?" said Darrell.

"When I kissed John," she laughed.

"And very nice too," grinned that worthy. "Unrehearsed effects are always best."

DRUMMOND rose and stretched himself.

"All over, chaps, all over. Back to the dreary round. Algernon," he hailed a passing waiter, "bring, my stout-hearted fellow, eight of those pale pink concoctions that the sweet thing in the bar fondly imagines are Martinis. I would fain propose a toast. But first—a small formality. Mr. Joseph Dixon will place his hand in his pocket and extract therefrom coins to the value of five shillings. I will then present him here and now with the insignia of the Ancient Order, feeling that he has well merited that high honour. Our Anthem he knows; he has already sung it twice in his cracked falsetto. The privileges attendant to our Order you will find enumerated in this small book, Mr. Dixon, and they should be studied in the solitude of your chamber, when alone with your thoughts. Especially our great insurance treble, which guards your dog from rabies, your cook from babies, and yourself from scabies. Great words, my masters, great words. I perceive that Algernon, panting and exhausted after his ten-yard walk, is with us again, carrying the raspberry juice with all his well-known flair. Lady and gentlemen—to our new Froth-Blower. And may I inquire which of you bat-faced sons of Belial has pinched the five bob?"

THE END.

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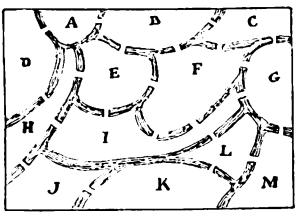
PERPLEXITIES.

By HENRY E. DUDENEY.

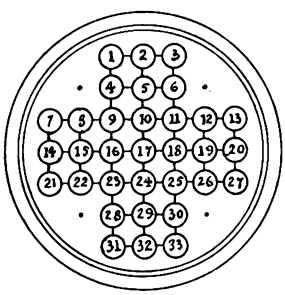
919.—THE TWENTY-TWO BRIDGES.

We have here a rough map of a district with an elaborate system of irrigation, as the various waterways and numerous bridges will show. A man set out from one of the lettered departments to pay a visit to a friend living in a different department. For the purpose of pedestrian exercise he crossed every one of the bridges once, and once only. The puzzle is to show in which two departments their houses are situated. It is, of course, exceedingly easy if you give it a few moments' thought. You must not, of course, go outside the borders of the diagram.



920.—A SOLITAIRE PUZZLE.

I think I have given in these pages only one puzzle on the ancient solitaire board, and the example is reprinted in my book, "Amusements in Mathematics." It is suggested to me that another puzzle on the same lines would be acceptable. I again use the English board of thirty-three holes, as here shown, the extra holes indicated by the dots being omitted on this board. A flat diagram with counters can, of course, be used in the absence of a board. The puzzle I give is to remove No. 2 from the board and then take off all the counters in a series of jumps except the last counter, which must be left in hole No. 2. You jump one counter over the next one to a vacant hole beyond, just as in draughts, and the counter jumped over is immediately taken off the board. Remember that every move must be a jump so that you take off a counter at each move and thirty-one single jumps will remove all the thirty-one counters. But compound moves are allowed (again as in draughts), for so long as one counter continues to jump the jumps all count as one move. It should be done in twenty-four such moves. Of course, no diagonal jumps are permitted; you only jump in the direction of the lines.



921.—FINDING A BIRTHDAY.

A Tasmanian correspondent (E. C. M.) informs me incidentally that on next Armistice Day, November 11th, he will have lived as long in the twentieth century as he lived in the nineteenth. This tempted me to work out the day of his birth. Perhaps the reader may like to do the same. We will assume he was born at midday.

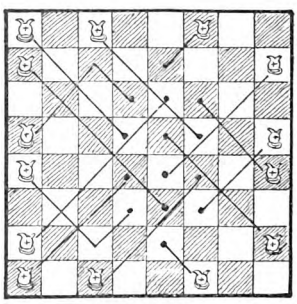
922.—THE FIVE VOWELS.

In seeking a series of words in which we may use the five vowels, a, e, i, o, u, in succession, we find it easy enough with three-letter words, such as rad, red, rid, rod, rud, and no difficulty with words of four letters, such as mate, mete, mite, mote, mute. But after that it becomes a little more difficult, and it will be found interesting to try to find a series of five English words, the longest possible, in which the five vowels may be varied in this way.

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

914.—BISHOPS AND THEIR SEES.

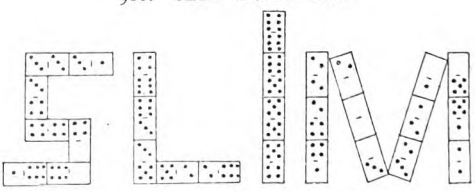
No more than fourteen Bishops can be placed on the chessboard at the same time without any Bishop attacking another. But it is imperative that they should all be on the sides of the board. The lines will indicate the moves that have been made, and it will be seen that one Bishop of each colour has had to make two moves, so that the total number of moves is sixteen—the fewest possible.



915.—LETTER FIGURE PUZZLE.

It is clear that A must be 1, that B and C must be either 6 and 2 or 3 and 5, and that in the third equation they are shown to be 3 and 5, since D must be 7. Then E must be 8 in order that D × E should show C = 5. Then the rest is easy, and we find the answer as follows: A = 1, B = 3, C = 5, D = 7, E = 8, F = 9, H = 6, J = 4, K = 2, L = 0.

916.—SLIM DOMINOES.



The illustration explains itself, as the number of pips in every letter is 42.

917.—FOOTBALL NEWS.

The words are: RESIGN (to abandon) and RESIGN (to sign again).

918.—SQUARING THE DIGITS.

Here is an answer in only four moves: 7 3, 3 4, 4 8, 2 5, and we get 1 5 7 3 2 6 8 4 9, which is the square of 12543. I have not found a solution in fewer moves.

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The STRAND MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1928.

Next Month:

Long First Instalment of a Romantic New Serial,

"The Altar of Honour"

By

ETHEL M. DELL.

Also

"Cases From My Crime-Book"

(New Series)

By H. ASHTON-WOLFE.

(See important announcement on page 261).

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Company for Gertrude

By

P. G. WODEHOUSE

Illustrated by
REGINALD CLEAVER

THE HON. FREDDIE THREEPWOOD, married to the charming daughter of Donaldson's Dog-Biscuits of Long Island City, N.Y., and sent home by his father-in-law to stimulate the sale of the firm's products in England, naturally thought right away of his Aunt Georgiana. There was a woman who literally ate dog-biscuits. She had owned, when he was last in the country, a matter of four Pekes, two Poms, a Yorkshire terrier, three Sealyhams, and a Borzoi; and if that didn't constitute a promising market for Donaldson's Dog-Joy, Freddie would like to know what did.

A day or so after his arrival, accordingly, he hastened round to Upper Brook Street to make a sales-talk; and it was as he was coming rather pensively out of the house at the conclusion of the interview that he ran into old Beefy Bingham, who had been up at Oxford with him. Several years had passed since the other, then a third-year Blood and Trial Eights man, had bicycled along towpaths saying rude things through a megaphone about Freddie's stomach, but he recognized him instantly. And this in spite of the fact that the passage of time appeared to have turned old Beefers into a clergyman. His colossal frame was clad in sober black, and he was wearing one of those collars which are kept in position without studs purely by the exercise of will-power.

"Beefers!" cried Freddie, his slight gloom vanishing in the pleasure of this happy reunion.

The Rev. Rupert Bingham returned his greeting with cordiality but without exuberance. He, too, seemed gloomy.

"Oh, hullo, Freddie," he said. And his voice was that of a man with a secret sorrow. "I haven't seen you for years. What were you doing in that house?"

"Trying to sell my aunt dog-biscuits."

"I didn't know Lady Alcester was your aunt."

"Didn't you, Beefers, old man? I thought it was all over London."

"I suppose she told you about me, then?"

"What about you?" Freddie stared. "Great Scott! Are you the impoverished bloke who wants to marry Gertrude?"

"Yes. And now they've gone and sent her off to Blandings, to be out of my way."

"But why are you impoverished? What about tithes? I always understood you birds made a pot out of tithes."

"There aren't any tithes where I am."

"Oh? H'm! Not so hot. Well, what are you going to do about it, Beefers?"

"I thought of calling on your aunt and trying to reason with her."

Freddie took his old friend's arm sympathetically and drew him away.

"No earthly good, old man. If a woman won't buy Dog-Joy, it means she has some sort of mental kink and it's no use trying to reason with her. We must think of some other procedure. So Gertrude is at Blandings, is she? She would be. The family seem to look on the place as a sort of Bastille. Whenever the young of the species make a floater like falling in love with the wrong man, they are always shot off to Blandings to recover. The guv'nor has often complained about it bitterly. Now, let me think."

They passed into Park Street. Some

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workmen were busy tearing up the paving with pneumatic drills, but the whirring of Freddie's brain made the sound almost inaudible.

"I've got it," he said at length, his features relaxing from the terrific strain. "And it's a dashed good thing for you, my lad, that I went last night to see that super-film, 'Young Hearts Adrift,' featuring Rosalie Norton and Otto Byng. Beefers, old man, you're legging it straight down to Blandings this very afternoon."

"What!"

"By the first train after lunch. I've got the whole thing planned out. In this super-film, 'Young Hearts Adrift,' a poor but deserving young man was in love with the daughter of rich and haughty parents, and they took her away to the country so that she could forget, and a few days later a mysterious stranger turned up at the place and ingratiated himself with the parents and said he wanted to marry their daughter, and they gave their consent, and the wedding took place, and then he tore off his whiskers and it was Jim!"

"Yes, but——"

"Don't argue. The thing's settled. My aunt needs a sharp lesson. You would think a woman would be only too glad to put business in the way of her nearest and dearest, especially when shown samples and offered a fortnight's free trial. But no! She insists on sticking to Peterson's Pup-Food, a wholly inferior product—lacking, I happen to know, in many of the essential vitamins, and from now on, old boy, I am heart and soul in your cause."

"Whiskers?" said the Rev. Rupert, doubtfully.

"You won't have to wear any whiskers. My guv'nor's never seen you. Or has he?"

"No, I've not met Lord Emsworth."

"Very well, then."

"But what good will it do me, ingratiating myself, as you call it, with your father? He's only Gertrude's uncle."

"What good? My dear chap, are you aware that the guv'nor owns the countryside for miles around? He has all sorts of livings up his sleeve—livings simply dripping with tithes, and can distribute them to whomever he likes. I know, because at one time there was an idea of making me a parson. But I would have none of it."

The Rev. Rupert's face cleared.

"Freddie, there's something in this."

"You bet there's something in it."

"But how can I ingratiate myself with your father?"

"Perfectly easy. Cluster round him. Hang on his every word. Interest yourself in his pursuits. Do him little services. Help him out of chairs—why, great Scott, I'd undertake to ingratiate myself with a man-eating tiger if I gave my mind to it. Pop off and pack the old toothbrush, and I'll go and get the guv'nor on the 'phone."

AT about the time when this pregnant conversation was taking place in London, W.1, far away in distant Shropshire Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, sat brooding in the library of Blandings Castle. Fate, usually indulgent to this dreamy peer, had suddenly turned nasty and smitten him a grievous blow beneath the belt.

They say Great Britain is still a first-class Power, doing well and winning respect from the nations: and, if so, it is, of course, extremely gratifying. But what of the future? That was what Lord Emsworth was asking himself. Could this happy state of things last? He thought not. Without wishing to be pessimistic, he was dashed if he saw how a country containing men like Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe of Matchingham Hall could hope to survive.

Strong? No doubt. Bitter? Granted. But not, we think, too strong, not—in the circumstances—unduly bitter. Consider the facts.

When, shortly after the triumph of Lord Emsworth's pre-eminent sow, Empress of Blandings, in the Fat Pigs class at the eighty-seventh annual Shropshire Agricultural Show, George Cyril Wellbeloved, his lordship's pig-man, had expressed a desire to hand in his portfolio and seek employment elsewhere, the amiable peer, though naturally grieved, felt no sense of outrage. He put the thing down to the old roving spirit of the Wellbeloveds. George Cyril, he assumed, wearying of Shropshire, wished to try a change of air in some southern or eastern county. A nuisance, undoubtedly, for the man, when sober, was beyond question a force in the piggery. He had charm and personality. Pigs liked him. Still, if he wanted to resign office, there was nothing to be done about it.

But when, not a week later, word was brought to Lord Emsworth that, so far from having migrated to Sussex or Norfolk or Kent or somewhere, the fellow was actually just round the corner in the neighbouring village of Much Matchingham, serving under the banner of Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe of Matchingham Hall, the scales fell from his eyes. He realized that black treachery had been at work. George Cyril Wellbeloved had sold himself for gold, and Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, hitherto looked upon as a high-minded friend and fellow Justice of the Peace, was in reality that lowest of created things, a lurer-away of other people's pig-men.

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"Beefers," said Freddie, "you're legging it straight down to Blandings this very afternoon"

And there was nothing one could do about it.

Monstrous!

But true.

So deeply was Lord Emsworth occupied with the consideration of this appalling state of affairs that it was only when the knock upon the door was repeated that it reached his consciousness.

"Come in," he said, hollowly.

He hoped it was not his niece Gertrude. A gloomy young woman. He could hardly stand Gertrude's society just now.

It was not Gertrude. It was Beach, the butler.

"Mr. Frederick wishes to speak to your lordship on the telephone."

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An additional layer of greyness fell over Lord Emsworth's spirit as he toddled down the great staircase to the telephone-closet in the hall. It was his experience that almost any communication from Freddie indicated trouble.

But there was nothing in his son's voice as it floated over the wire to suggest that all was not well.

"Hullo, guv'nor."

"Well, Frederick?"

"How's everything at Blandings?"

Lord Emsworth was not the man to exhibit the vultures gnawing at his heart to a babbler like the Hon. Freddie. He replied, though it hurt him to do so, that everything at Blandings was excellent.

"Good-oh!" said Freddie. "Is the old doss-house very full up at the moment?"

"If," replied his lordship, "you are alluding to Blandings Castle, there is nobody at present staying here except myself and your cousin Gertrude. Why," he added in quick alarm, "were you thinking of coming down?"

"Good God, no!" cried his son with equal horror. "I mean to say, I'd love to, of course, but just now I'm too busy with Dog-Joy."

"Who is Popjoy?"

"Popjoy? Popjoy? Oh, ah, yes. He's a pal of mine and, as you've plenty of room, I want you to put him up for a bit. Nice chap. You'll like him. Right-ho; then I'll ship him off on the three-fifteen."

Lord Emsworth's face had assumed an expression which made it fortunate for his son that television was not yet in operation on the telephone systems of England; and he had just recovered enough breath for the delivery of a blistering refusal to have any friend of Freddie's within fifty miles of the place, when the other spoke again.

"He'll be company for Gertrude."

And at these words a remarkable change came over Lord Emsworth. His face untwisted itself. The basilisk glare died out of his eyes.

"God bless my soul! That's true," he exclaimed. "That's certainly true. So he will. The three-fifteen, did you say? I will send the car to Market Blandings to meet it."

COMPANY for Gertrude? A pleasing thought. A fragrant, refreshing, stimulating thought. Somebody to take Gertrude off his hands occasionally was what he had been praying for ever since his sister Georgiana had dumped her down on him.

One of the chief drawbacks to entertaining in your home a girl who has been crossed in love is that she is extremely apt to go about the place doing good. All that life holds for her now is the opportunity of being kind to others, and she intends to be kind if it chokes them. For two weeks Lord Emsworth's beautiful young niece had been moving to and fro through the castle with a drawn face, doing good right and left: and his lordship, being handiest, had had to bear the brunt of it. It was with the first real smile he had smiled that day that he came out of the telephone-closet and found the object of his thoughts entering the hall in front of him.

"Well, well, well, my dear," he said, cheerily. "And what have you been doing?"

There was no answering smile on his niece's face. Indeed, looking at her, you could see that this was a girl who had forgotten how to smile. She suggested something symbolic out of Maeterlinck.

"I have been tidying your study, Uncle Clarence," she replied, listlessly. "It was in a dreadful mess."

Lord Emsworth winced as a man of set habits will who has been remiss enough to let a Little Mother get at his study while his back is turned, but he continued bravely on the cheerful note.

"I have been talking to Frederick on the telephone."

"Yes?" Gertrude sighed, and a bleak wind seemed to blow through the hall. "Your tie's crooked, Uncle Clarence."

"I like it crooked," said his lordship, backing. "I have a piece of news for you. A friend of Frederick's is coming down here to-night for a visit. His name, I understand, is Popjoy. So you will have some young society at last."

"I don't want young society."

"Oh, come, my dear."

She looked at him thoughtfully with large, sombre eyes. Another sigh escaped her.

"It must be wonderful to be as old as you are, Uncle Clarence."

"Eh?" said his lordship, starting.

"To feel that there is such a short, short step to the quiet tomb, to the ineffable peace of the grave. To me, life seems to stretch out endlessly, like a long, dusty desert. Twenty-three! That's all I am. Only twenty-three. And all our family live to sixty."

"What do you mean, sixty?" demanded his lordship with the warmth of a man who would be that next birthday. "My poor father was seventy-six when he was killed in the hunting-field. My Uncle Robert lived till nearly ninety. My cousin Claude was eighty-four when he broke his neck trying to jump a five-barred gate. My mother's brother Alistair——"

"Don't!" said the girl with a little

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shudder. "Don't! It makes it all seem so awful and hopeless."

Yes, that was Gertrude: and in Lord Emsworth's opinion she needed company.

THE reactions of Lord Emsworth to the young man Popjoy, when he encountered him for the first time in the drawing-room shortly before dinner, were in the beginning wholly favourable. His son's friend was an extraordinarily large and powerful person with a frank, open, ingenuous face about the colour of the inside of a salmon, and he seemed a little nervous. That, however, was in his favour. It was, his lordship felt, a pleasant surprise to find in one of the younger generation so novel an emotion as diffidence.

He condoned, therefore, the other's trick of laughing hysterically even when the subject under discussion was the not irresistibly ludicrous one of slugs in the rose-garden. He excused him for appearing to find something outstandingly comic in the statement that the glass was going up. And when, springing to his feet at the entrance of Gertrude, the young man performed some complicated steps in conjunction with a table covered with china and photograph frames, he joined in the mirth which the feat provoked not only from the visitor, but actually from Gertrude herself.

Yes, amazing though it must seem, his niece Gertrude, on seeing this young Popjoy, had suddenly burst into a peal of happy laughter. The gloom of the last two weeks appeared to be gone. She laughed. He laughed. The young man laughed. They proceeded down to dinner in a perfect gale of merriment, rather like a chorus of revellers exiting after a concerted number in an old-fashioned comic opera.

And at dinner the young man had spilt his soup, broken a wine-glass, and almost taken another spectacular toss when leaping up at the end of the meal to open the door. At which Gertrude had laughed, and the young man had laughed, and his lordship had laughed—though not, perhaps, quite so heartily as the young folks, for that wine-glass had been one of a set which he valued.

However, weighing profit and loss as he sipped his port, Lord Emsworth considered that the ledger worked out on the right side. True, he had taken into his home what appeared to be a half-witted acrobat; but then any friend of his son Frederick was bound to be weak in the head, and, after all, the great thing was that Gertrude seemed to appreciate the new-comer's society. He looked forward contentedly to a succession of sunshine days of peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away; days when he would be able to work in his garden without the fear, which had been haunting him for the last two weeks, of finding his niece drooping wanly at his side and asking him if he was wise to stand about in the hot sun. She had company now that would occupy her elsewhere.

His lordship's opinion of his guest's mental deficiencies was strengthened late that night when, hearing footsteps on the terrace, he poked his head out and found him standing beneath his window, blowing kisses at it.

At the sight of his host he appeared somewhat confused.

"Lovely evening," he said, with his usual hyæna-esque laugh. "I—er—thought . . . or, rather . . . that is to say . . . Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is anything the matter?"

"No, no. No. No, thanks, no. No. No, no. I—er—ho, ho, ho!—just came out for a stroll, ha, ha!"

Lord Emsworth returned to his bed a little thoughtfully. Perhaps some premonition of what was to come afflicted his subconscious mind, for, as he slipped between the sheets, he shivered. But gradually, as he dozed off, his equanimity became restored.

Looking at the thing in the right spirit, it might have been worse. After all, he felt, the mists of sleep beginning to exert their usual beneficent influence, he might have been entertaining at Blandings Castle one of his nephews, or one of his sisters, or even—though this was morbid—his younger son Frederick.

IN matters where shades of feeling are involved, it is not always easy for the historian to be as definite as he would wish. He wants to keep the record straight, and yet he cannot take any one particular moment of time, pin it down for the scrutiny of Posterity, and say, "This was the moment when Lord Emsworth for the first time found himself wishing that his guest would tumble out of an upper window and break his neck." To his lordship it seemed that this had been from the beginning his constant day-dream, but such was not the case. When, on the second morning of the other's visit, the luncheon-gong had found them chatting in the library, and the young man, bounding up, had extended a hand like a ham, and, placing it beneath his host's arm, gently helped him to rise, Lord Emsworth had been distinctly pleased by the courteous attention.

But when the fellow did the same thing day after day, night after night, every time he caught him sitting; when he offered him an arm to help him across floors; when he

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assisted him up stairs, along corridors, down paths, out of rooms, and into raincoats; when he snatched objects from his hands to carry them himself; when he came galloping out of the house on dewy evenings laden down with rugs, mufflers, hats, and, on one occasion, positively a blasted respirator—why, then Lord Emsworth's proud spirit rebelled. He was a tough old gentleman, and, like most tough old gentlemen, did not enjoy having his juniors look on him as something pathetically helpless that crawled the earth waiting for the end.

It had been bad enough when Gertrude was being the Little Mother. This was infinitely worse. Apparently having conceived for him one of those unreasoning, overwhelming devotions, this young Popjoy stuck closer than a brother; and for the first time Lord Emsworth began to appreciate what must have been the feelings of that Mary who aroused a similar attachment in the bosom of her lamb. It was as if he had been an Oldest Inhabitant fallen into the midst of a troop of Boy Scouts, all doing Good Deeds simultaneously, and he resented it with an indescribable bitterness. One can best illustrate his frame of mind by saying that, during the last phase, if he had been called upon to choose between his guest and Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe as a companion for a summer ramble through the woods, he would have chosen Sir Gregory.

And then, on top of all this, there occurred the episode of the step-ladder.

THE HON. FREDDIE THREEPWOOD, who had decided to run down and see how matters were developing, learned the details of this rather unfortunate occurrence from his cousin Gertrude. She met him at Market Blandings Station, and he could see there was something on her mind. She had not become positively Maeterlinckian again, but there was sorrow in her beautiful eyes: and Freddie, rightly holding that with a brainy egg like himself directing her destinies they should have contained only joy and sunshine, was disturbed by this.

"Don't tell me the binge has sprung a leak," he said, anxiously.

Gertrude sighed.

"Well, yes and no."

"What do you mean, yes and no? Properly worked, the thing can't fail. This points to negligence somewhere. Has old Beefers been ingratiating himself?."

"Yes."

"Hanging on the guv'nor's every word? Interesting himself in his pursuits? Doing him little services? And been at it two weeks? Good heavens! By now the guv'nor should be looking on him as a prize pig. Why isn't he?"

"I didn't say he wasn't. Till this afternoon I rather think he was. At any rate, Rupert says he often found Uncle Clarence staring at him in a sort of lingering, rather yearning way. But when that thing happened this afternoon, I'm afraid he wasn't very pleased."

"What thing?"

"That step-ladder business. It was like this. Rupert and I sort of went for a walk after lunch, and by the time I had persuaded him that he ought to go and find Uncle Clarence and ingratiate himself with him, Uncle Clarence had disappeared. So Rupert hunted about for a long time, and at last he heard a snipping noise and found him miles away standing on a step-ladder, sort of pruning some kind of tree with a pair of shears. So Rupert said: 'Oh, there you are!' and Uncle Clarence said Yes, there he was, and Rupert said, 'Ought you to tire yourself? Won't you let me do that for you?'"

"The right note," said Freddie, approvingly. "Assiduity. Zeal. Well?"

"Well, Uncle Clarence said, 'No, thank you'—Rupert thinks it was 'Thank you'—and Rupert stood there for a bit, sort of talking, and then he suddenly remembered and told Uncle Clarence that you had just 'phoned that you were coming down this evening, and I think Uncle Clarence must have got a touch of cramp or something, because he gave a kind of sudden sharp groan, Rupert says, and sort of quivered all over. This made the steps wobbly, of course, so Rupert dashed forward to steady them, and he doesn't know how it happened, but they suddenly seemed to sort of shut up like a pair of scissors, and the next thing he knew Uncle Clarence was sitting on the grass, not seeming to like it much, Rupert says. He had ricked his ankle a bit and shaken himself up a bit, and altogether, Rupert says, he wasn't fearfully sunny. Rupert says he thinks he may have lost ground a little."

Freddie pondered with knit brows. He was feeling something of the chagrin of a general who, after sweating himself to a shadow planning a great campaign, finds his troops unequal to carrying it out.

"It's such a pity it should have happened. One of the vicars near here has just been told by the doctor that he's got to go off to the South of France, and the living is in Uncle Clarence's gift. If only Rupert could have had that, we could have got married. However, he's bought Uncle Clarence some lotion."

Freddie started. A more cheerful expression came into his sternly careworn face.

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The young man had spilt his soup, broken a wine-glass, and almost taken another spectacular toss when leaping up at the end of the meal to open the door. At which Gertrude had laughed, and the young man had laughed, and his lordship had laughed.

"Lotion?"

"For his ankle."

"He couldn't have done better," said Freddie, warmly. "Apart from showing the contrite heart, he has given the guv'nor medicine, and medicine to the guv'nor is what catnip is to the cat. Above all things he dearly loves a little bit of amateur doctoring. As a rule he tries it on somebody else—two years ago he gave one of the housemaids some patent ointment for chilblains and she went screaming about the house—

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but, no doubt, now that the emergency has occurred, he will be equally agreeable to treating himself. Old Beefers has made the right move."

IN predicting that Lord Emsworth would appreciate the gift of lotion, Freddie had spoken with an unerring knowledge of his father's character. The master of Blandings was one of those fluffy-minded old gentlemen who are happiest when experimenting with strange drugs. In a less censorious age he would have been a Borgia. It was not until he had retired to bed that he discovered the paper-wrapped bottle on the table by his side. Then he remembered that the pest Popjoy had mumbled something at dinner about buying him something or other for his injured ankle. He tore off the paper and examined the contents of the bottle with a lively satisfaction. The liquid was a dingy grey and sloshed pleasantly when you shook it. The name on the label—Blake's Balsam—was new to him, and that in itself was a recommendation.

His ankle had long since ceased to pain him, and to some men this might have seemed an argument against smearing it with balsam; but not to Lord Emsworth. He decanted a liberal dose into the palm of his hand. He sniffed it. It had a strong, robust, bracing sort of smell. He spent the next five minutes thoughtfully rubbing it in. Then he put the light out and went to sleep.

It is a truism to say that in the world as it is at present constituted few things have more far-reaching consequences than the accident of birth. Lord Emsworth had probably suspected this. He was now to receive direct proof. If he had been born a horse instead of the heir to an earldom, that lotion would have been just right for him. It was for horses, though the Rev. Rupert Bingham had omitted to note the fact, that Blake had planned his balsam: and anyone enjoying even a superficial acquaintance with horses and earls knows that an important difference between them is that the latter have the more sensitive skins. Waking at a quarter to two from dreams of being burned at the stake by Red Indians, Lord Emsworth found himself suffering acute pain in the right leg.

He was a little surprised. He had not supposed that that fall from the ladder had injured him so badly. However, being a good amateur doctor, he bore up bravely and took immediate steps to cope with the trouble. Having shaken the bottle till it foamed at the mouth, he rubbed in some more lotion. It occurred to him that the previous application might have been too sketchy, so this time he did it thoroughly. He rubbed and kneaded for some twenty minutes. Then he tried to go to sleep.

Nature has made some men quicker thinkers than others. Lord Emsworth's was one of those leisurely brains. It was not till nearly four o'clock that the truth came home to him. When it did, he was just on the point of applying a fifth coating of the balsam to his leg. He stopped abruptly, replaced the cork, and, jumping out of bed, hobbled to the cold-water tap and put as much of himself under it as he could manage.

The relief was perceptible, but transitory. At five he was out again, and once more at half-past. At a quarter to six, succeeding in falling asleep, he enjoyed a slumber, somewhat disturbed by the intermittent biting of sharks, which lasted till a few minutes past eight. Then he woke as if an alarum-clock had rung, and realized that further sleep was out of the question.

He rose from his bed and peered out of the window. It was a beautiful morning. There had been rain in the night, and a world that looked as if it had just come back from the cleaner's sparkled under a beaming sun. Cedars cast long shadows over the smooth green lawns. Rooks cawed soothingly; thrushes bubbled in their liquid and musical way; and the air was full of summer humming. Among those present of the insect world, Lord Emsworth noticed several prominent gnats.

Beyond the terrace, glittering through the trees, gleamed the waters of the lake. They seemed to call to him like a bugle. Although he had neglected the practice of late, there was nothing Lord Emsworth enjoyed more than a before-breakfast dip: and to-day anything in the nature of water had a particularly powerful appeal for him. The pain in his ankle had subsided by now to a dull throbbing, and it seemed to him that a swim might remove it altogether. Putting on a dressing-gown and slippers, he took his bathing-suit from its drawer and went downstairs.

THE beauties of a really fine English summer day are so numerous that it is excusable in a man if he fails immediately to notice them all. Only when the pleasurable agony of the first plunge had passed and he was floating out in mid-water did Lord Emsworth realize that in some extraordinary way he had overlooked what was beyond dispute the best thing that this perfect morning had to offer him. Gazing from his bedroom window, he had observed the sun, the shadows, the birds, the trees, and the insects, but he had omitted to appreciate the fact that nowhere in this

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summer stillness that hung over the gardens of Blandings Castle a sudden sharp wail that seemed to tell of a human being in mortal distress. It was the voice of Lord Emsworth, raised in song.

It was a gruesome sound, calculated to startle the stoutest: and two bees, buzzing among the lavender, stopped as one bee and looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Nor were they alone affected. Snails withdrew into their shells; a squirrel doing

The steps seemed to shut up like a pair of scissors, and the next thing he knew Uncle Clarence was sitting on the grass.

magic world that stretched before him was there a trace of his young guest, Popjoy. For the first time in two weeks he appeared to be utterly alone and free from him.

Floating on his back and gazing up into the turquoise sky, his lordship thrilled at the thought. He kicked sportively in a spasm of pure happiness. But this, he felt, was not enough. It failed to express his full happiness. To the beatitude of this golden moment only music, that mystic language of the soul, could really do justice. The next moment there had cut quiveringly into the calisthenics on the cedar nearly fell off its branch: and—moving a step up in the animal kingdom—the Rev. Rupert Bingham, standing behind the rhododendron bushes and wondering how long it would be before the girl he loved came to keep her tryst, started violently, dropped his cigarette, and, tearing off his coat, rushed to the water's edge.

Out in the middle of the lake,. Lord Emsworth's transports continued undiminished. His dancing feet kicked up a flurry of foam. His short-sighted, but

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sparkling, eyes stared into the blue. His voice rose to a pulsing scream.

"Love me," sang Lord Emsworth, "and the wo-o-o-rld is—ah—mi-yun!"

"It's all right," said a voice in his ear. "Keep cool. Keep quite cool."

The effect of a voice speaking suddenly, as it were, out of the void is always, even in these days of wireless, disconcerting to a man. Had he been on dry land, Lord Emsworth would have jumped. Being in ten feet of water, he went under as if a hand had pushed him. He experienced a momentary feeling of suffocation, and then a hand gripped him painfully by the fleshy part of the arm and he was on the surface again, spluttering.

"Keep quite cool," murmured the voice. "There's no danger."

And now he recognized whose voice it was.

There is a point beyond which the human brain loses its kinship with the Infinite and becomes a mere seething mass of deleterious passions. Malays, when pushed past this point, take down the old *kris* from its hook and go out and start carving up the neighbours. Women have hysterics. Earls, if Lord Emsworth may be taken as a sample, haul back their right fists and swing them as violently as their age and physique will permit. For two long weeks Lord Emsworth had been enduring this pestilential young man with outward nonchalance, but the strain had told. Suppressed emotions are always the most dangerous. Little by little, day by day, he had been slowly turning into a human volcano, and this final outrage blew the lid off him.

He raged with a sense of intolerable injury. Was it not enough that this porous plaster of a young man should dog his steps on shore? Must he even pursue him out into the waste of waters and come fooling about and pawing at him when he was enjoying the best swim he had had that summer? In all their long and honourable history no member of his ancient family had ever so far forgotten the sacred obligations of hospitality as to plug a guest in the eye. But then they had never had guests like this. With a sharp, passionate snort, Lord Emsworth extracted his right hand from the foam, clenched it, drew it back, and let it go.

He could have made no more imprudent move. If there was one thing the Rev. Rupert Bingham, who in his time had swum for Oxford, knew, it was what to do when drowning men struggled. Something that might have been a very hard and knobbly leg of mutton smote Lord Emsworth violently behind the ear; the sun was turned off at the main; the stars came out, many of them of a singular brightness; there was a sound of rushing waters; and he knew no more.

WHEN Lord Emsworth came to himself he was lying in bed. And as it seemed a very good place to be, he remained there. His head ached abominably, but he scarcely noticed this, so occupied was he with the thoughts that surged inside it. He mused on the young man Popjoy; he meditated on Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe; and wondered from time to time which he disliked the more. It was a problem almost too nice for human solution. Here, on the one hand, you had a man who pestered you for two weeks and wound up by nearly murdering you as you bathed, but who did not steal pig-men; there, on the other, one who stole pig-men but who stopped short of actual assault on the person. Who could hope to hold the scales between such a pair?

He had just remembered the lotion and was wondering if this might not be considered the deciding factor in this contest for the position of the world's premier blot, when the door opened and the Hon. Freddie Threepwood insinuated himself into the room.

"Hullo, guv'nor."

"Well, Frederick?"

"How are you feeling?"

"Extremely ill."

"Might have been worse, you know."

"Bah!"

"Watery grave and all that."

"Tchah!" said Lord Emsworth.

There was a pause. Freddie, wandering about the room, picked up and fidgeted with a chair, a vase, a hair-brush, a comb, and a box of matches; then, retracing his steps, fidgeted with them all over again in the reverse order. Finally he came to the foot of his father's bed and drooped over it like, it seemed to the sufferer's prejudiced eye, some hideous animal gaping over a fence.

"I say, guv'nor."

"Well, Frederick?"

"Narrow squeak, that, you know."

"Pah!"

"Do you wish to thank your brave preserver?"

Lord Emsworth plucked at the coverlet.

"If that young man comes near me," he said, "I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"Eh?" Freddie stared. "Don't you like him?"

"Like him? I think he is the most appalling young man I ever met."

It is customary when making statements of this kind to except present company, but so deeply did Lord Emsworth feel

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on the subject that he omitted to do so. Freddie, having announced that he was dashed, removed himself from the bed-rail, and, wandering once more about the room, fidgeted with a toothbrush, a soap-dish, a shoe, a volume on Spring bulbs, and a collar-stud.

"I say, guv'nor."

"Well, Frederick?"

"That's all very well, you know, guv'nor," said the Hon. Freddie, returning to his post, and seeming to draw moral support from the feel of the bed-rail, "but after what's happened it looks to me as if you were jolly well bound to lend your countenance to the union, if you know what I mean?"

"Union? What are you talking about? What union?"

"Gertrude and old Beefers."

"Who the devil is old Beefers?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you about that. This bird Popjoy's name isn't Popjoy. It's Bingham. Old Beefy Bingham. You know, the fellow Aunt Georgie doesn't want to marry Gertrude."

"Eh?"

"Throw your mind back. They pushed her off to Blandings to keep her out of his way. And I had the idea of sending him down here incog. to ingratiate himself with you. The scheme being that, when you had learned to love him, you would slip him a vacant vicarage, thus enabling them to get married. Beefers is a parson, you know."

Lord Emsworth did not speak. It was not so much the shock of this revelation that kept him dumb as the astounding discovery that any man could really want to marry Gertrude and any girl this Popjoy. Like many a thinker before him, he was feeling that there is really no limit to the eccentricity of human tastes. The thing made his head swim.

But when it had ceased swimming he perceived that this was but one aspect of the affair. Before him stood the man who had inflicted Popjoy on him, and with something of King Lear in his demeanour, Lord Emsworth rose slowly from the pillows. Words trembled on his lips, but he rejected them as not strong enough and sought in his mind for others.

"YOU know, guv'nor," proceeded Freddie, "there's nothing to prevent you doing the square thing and linking two young hearts in the bonds of the love-god, if you want to. I mean to say, old Braithwaite at Much Matchingham has been ordered to the South of France by his doctor, so there's a living going that you've got to slip to somebody."

Lord Emsworth sank back on the pillows.

"Much Matchingham!"

"Oh, dash it, you must know Much Matchingham, guv'nor. It's just round the corner. Where old Parsloe-Parsloe lives."

"Much Matchingham!"

Lord Emsworth was blinking, as if his eyes had seen a dazzling light. How wrong, he felt, how wickedly mistaken and lacking in faith he had been when he had said to himself in his folly that Providence offers no method of retaliation to the just whose pigmen have been persuaded by Humanity's dregs to leave their employment and seek advanced wages elsewhere. Conscience could not bring remorse to Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, and the Law, in its imperfect state, was powerless to punish. But there was still a way. With this young man, Popjoy—or Bingham—or whatever his name was—permanently established not a hundred yards from his park-gates, would Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe ever draw another really care-free breath? From his brief, but sufficient, acquaintance with the young man Bingham—or Popjoy—Lord Emsworth thought not.

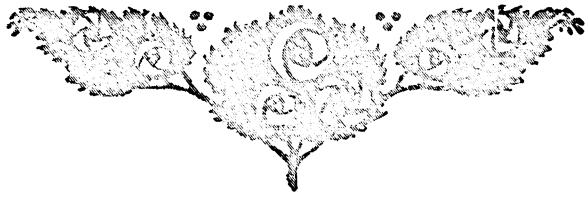
The punishment was severe, but who could say that Sir Gregory had not earned it?

"A most admirable idea," said Lord Emsworth, cordially. "Certainly I will give your friend the living of Much Matchingham."

"You will?"

"Most decidedly."

"At-a-boy, guv'nor!" said Freddie. "Came the Dawn!"



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The Little Yellow Birds

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Illustrated by
S. ABBEY

DETECTIVE BRETT and Lady Muriel, his sometime associate, were dining together "Chez Francis," a small, half-French, half-English restaurant in the neighbourhood of Soho. They were ensconced at one of the most desirable corner tables. They had not met for a week, and Lady Muriel was perfectly well aware that she was looking her best—her new hat, purchased that afternoon, with its Russian effect of grey fur, and a dash of rose colour, was entirely becoming. Nevertheless, her companion had been unusually silent.

"I believe," she complained, about halfway through the meal, "that you have a new case in hand. You have scarcely spoken a word for ten minutes."

He smiled and produced a letter.

"No new case for me, thank you, Lady Muriel," he declared. "I'm rather silent because you're so good to look at to-night. The old case is quite absorbing enough. Read this letter. It may amuse you."

So he had noticed her hat, after all! Lady Muriel smoothed open the sheet of notepaper and read:—

Claridge's Hotel.

My dear Brett,

I am tired of writing to your Chief. So, you see, I am sending you a line instead. Perhaps you will prove yourself a little more intelligent and amenable. I have quite lost my dislike for you since the Grosvenor Square episode. What an awful moment that must have been when you found that you had blundered about Mr. Vandoorn, and that the Duc d'Angoulême had left the party! You must never trust these Anglo-Saxon ladies who have bought their way into the nobility when they talk about their titled friends. They mean well, but the truth is not in them.

Now, you are wondering, aren't you, what my next exploit is to be? It will be a perfectly tame affair for me if I bring it off whilst you are sitting in your stuffy room at Scotland Yard wondering. The odds are so greatly against the detective of average ability who is up against an artist in crime, with my genius and organization, that I must really give you a hint, Brett—just something to think about. I don't suppose you will get on the right track until the whole thing is over, but still I shall like to feel that you have had your chance. I am going to steal what is to my mind one of the finest pictures in England, and my favourite master is Gainsborough. Come along, little man! Trot round and get busy!

Ever yours,
MATTHEW.

Lady Muriel laughed.

"Philip," she said—lately she had begun to call him Philip when they were alone—"if ever you take this man, I think that I shall dislike you very much. Fancy a criminal with a sense of humour!"

"All at my expense."

"Well, you'll change all that some day," she assured him encouragingly. "What are you doing about the letter?"

"All the obvious things," he replied. "That's the worst of our profession, we always have to start by doing the obvious things. A man at the National Gallery is

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getting me out a list of all the Gainsboroughs on exhibition in England, and privately owned. The Chief and I are going through them to-morrow."

They continued their dinner pleasantly for some short time. Then she leaned forward once more.

"Now that you have got the letter off your mind," she begged, "perhaps you will explain your second lapse this evening. Why are you so interested in those two men on our right?"

"Look at them, and answer the question for yourself," he suggested.

She waited for a convenient opportunity to get a better view of the two men. Certainly they were a little unusual. One, the younger, might have been a Jew or an inhabitant of one of the Near Eastern countries. He had curly black hair, extraordinarily protuberant dark eyes, full lips, and an unnaturally fresh complexion. He talked with great animation, although in a low tone, using many gesticulations, and he was so hot that he was continually mopping his forehead with an unsavoury-looking handkerchief. His companion was a small, fat, and dumpy man, ill-dressed in clothes which looked as though they had been slept in for several nights. He wore brown shoes on which reposed the mud of days, thick socks which had descended with concertina effect almost to his ankles, and the variegated pattern of his linen indifferently concealed its griminess. Nevertheless, there stood upon the table a bottle of expensive champagne.

"A MORE unpleasant-looking couple I never saw," Lady Muriel pronounced. "The young man with the bulbous eyes makes me shiver, and his companion might have been dragged out of the dustbin."

"Sheer externals," Brett murmured. "If you allow yourself to be prejudiced like that, you will never become a detective."

"I'm sure I don't want to," she declared. "My ambitions are limited to a little *pied-à-terre* in town—my two rooms in the mews would do quite well—a cottage near a trout stream at home, with a roof that didn't leak, a horse that would carry me once a week with Desmond's hounds—well, I think that's all for the present."

"It seems a pity," Brett sighed, "that this profession, in which you have already had so many distinguished successes, does not really appeal to you."

"Don't gibe, please. As a means to an end, it is quite all right. I would rather do it, for instance, than wait in a shop, or typewrite or manicure. It's keeping me going nicely, but that's all there is in it. I should like to make some money. Where my fur coat is coming from this season, I haven't the least idea."

"The administration is very fair," he reminded her. "If you could prove vital work in connection with the arrest of any criminal for whom there was a reward, you'd get a share."

"Do you think those two men you've scarcely taken your eyes off are criminals?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," he assured her. "I should think that they would be, either of them, if it were worth their while. Crime is like everything else nowadays, though. To make it pay, it requires a considerable amount of talent."

"Quite right," she assented, watching her glass being filled. "As a matter of fact, crime as a profession always appealed to me much more than the detection of it, but so much more is required of one in the way of intelligence and resource, and there doesn't seem to be any regular training school. There should be an Academy of Crime, of course, and one shouldn't be allowed to practise until one has taken a degree."

"Failing that," he remarked, dryly, "I think you do very well as you are."

With the service of coffee Lady Muriel leaned across the table, and Brett flinched. He was always afraid of these more intimate moments. Her lips, when she chose, could be very alluring, and she had the wicked gift of softening her eyes at will.

"I believe you have something on your mind," she whispered. "Is it about me?"

"I have you always too much on my mind," he answered, with futile gallantry.

"You couldn't," she assured him. "I am really good for you. I am an antidote to all the excitements and difficulties of your day. Don't you find me soothing?"

"No."

She laughed at him delightfully.

"Tell me," she begged.

"Those men are worrying me," he confessed, dropping his voice. "I have had my successes, of course, and my failures, but I shall never be a successful detective, for one reason."

"And that, dear modest friend?"

"My memory. The face of the younger of those two men who have just gone out ought not to be forgotten. Subconsciously I remember it; actually I can connect it with nothing."

She smiled, with gentle derision.

"Even I," she confided, "can tell you where you saw it."

"Then do," he begged.

"You saw his photograph in *The Daily Sketch*, and perhaps *The Daily Mirror*, this morning. He was an exhibitor at a bird show in the Agricultural Hall. His name is Chittuck, he comes from Norwich, and

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"I am very anxious," Detective Brett confided, "to discover the present whereabouts of the man who bought your canaries. Matthew the Killer he was once called."

he won the first prize for canaries. I believe that he is also in business as a shoemaker. To tell you the truth, I've only just remembered myself."

He looked at her for a moment, and then laughed softly—laughed until little lines spread out by the side of those ingenuous grey eyes. Yet, when he became serious again, he was very serious indeed.

"You are quite right," he exclaimed. "I saw the picture in the *Sketch*, but, alas, I never read the letterpress."

PHILIP BRETT made a model tourist. He came down to breakfast in the coffee-room of the Maid's Head Hotel punctually at nine o'clock, swinging a camera, and with a guide book to Norwich in his hand. He ate bacon and eggs with appetite, and forebore to grumble at the coffee. Furthermore, he allowed himself afterwards to be shown Queen Elizabeth's bedroom, although he hastily negatived the suggestion that he might be allowed to sleep in it for the night. He accepted the services of a guide to show him over the Cathedral and the Strangers' Hall, and spent the whole of the morning inspecting these places. In the afternoon he poked about by himself amongst the antique shops and the picturesque by-ways of the ancient city, and it was only when dusk fell that he embarked upon the real purpose of his visit to the Eastern Counties. Then, after discreet inquiries, he took one of the narrow streets running eastwards from the Cathedral, and

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walked on until he reached a gloomy archway, by the side of which on the red brick wall was a brass plate, with the inscription:—

"CHITTUCK AND BAYNES,
CHILDREN'S BOOT AND SHOE MANUFACTURERS."

Here he turned in, and was proceeding along a cobbled way towards a good-sized and brilliantly-illuminated square factory, separated from him by a tangled waste of what had probably once been cottage gardens, when he became aware of a smaller building on his right-hand side, upon the door of which was a sign engraved:—

"OFFICE."

He paused and glanced through the uncurtained window. Mr. Chittuck with a canary upon each shoulder, one on his head, and another pecking at his collar, was standing at a desk, writing in a ledger. Brett knocked at the door, and a high-pitched, Eastern Counties voice bade him enter. He stepped in, closed the door behind him, and saluted the man whom he had come to visit.

"What can I do for you, sir?" the latter asked briskly.

"My name is Bennett," Brett lied. "Are you Mr. Chittuck, the famous canary breeder?"

The young man had his pen in his mouth for the moment, whilst he carefully blotted his latest entry, but he signified assent with a nod.

"I saw your canaries at the Agricultural Hall on Tuesday," the newcomer continued. "Marvellous birds!"

"The best in the world."

"I should like to acquire a few of the male songsters myself. Have you any of the prize-winners for sale?"

"Not one—sold the lot—all to one man."

"Dear me!" Brett exclaimed, in a tone of concern. "That's hard luck. All to one man, eh?"

"That's so. These birds I have with me here are all pets. I shouldn't ever part with them, although they are poor songsters. These others were bred to sell and to show. Sorry, sir."

Brett, although he was receiving scant encouragement, showed no signs of hurrying away. He moved, instead, a little nearer to the desk, and stood beside the canary breeder.

"You couldn't tell me, I suppose," he asked, insinuatingly, "to whom you sold them?"

"No, I couldn't," was the prompt reply, "and it wouldn't be any good to you if I did. He's a wealthy man, and he wouldn't part with one of them for its weight in gold."

"Nevertheless—you don't happen to remember his name?" Brett persisted.

The young man, who had begun once more to write in his ledger, turned around and faced his questioner.

"What business is it of yours whom I sold them to?" he demanded. "I tell you he wouldn't part with one of them. Isn't that enough for you?"

Brett glanced over his shoulder. There was no doubt that the little waiting-room behind—a room, it appeared, devoted to travellers' samples—was empty. Nevertheless, he dropped his voice.

"I am very anxious," he confided, "to discover the present whereabouts of the man who bought your canaries. What name shall we give him? It doesn't really matter, does it? Matthew the Killer he was once called in the Force."

THERE was a queer silence, broken only by a sharp intake of breath on the part of Mr. Chittuck, and a hopeful chirp from one of the birds who had at last succeeded in balancing himself upon his master's collar. Then the pen slipped from the latter's nerveless fingers, and fell spluttering on to the floor. One very dirty hand gripped the side of the desk. He stared at his harmless-looking visitor, and he was a man very much afraid.

"Who are you?" he muttered.

"I am from Scotland Yard, of course," Brett admitted. "I don't wish you any harm, Chittuck. We've got nothing against you just for the present, except that we know that you've had goods from Ellis and Humphreys and that you're one of the gang, but we want Matthew."

"How did you tumble to this?"

"Luck," was the frank confession. "Sheer, downright luck! We've got a four-or-five-page record of Matthew's weaknesses, various disguises he's made use of, his habits, and every particular we could collect about him at Scotland Yard. One of these weaknesses has always been a partiality for canaries. He's never been without them. Now when the Show came on we thought it just worth while to have a man at the Agricultural Hall."

"Gawd!" Mr. Chittuck gasped, dabbing some of the unhealthy perspiration from his forehead.

"I must tell you that we weren't particularly fortunate there," Brett continued. "We had a good man watching your store, but the transaction was done too quickly. We were never able to get more than the faintest description of the purchaser. Still, in the morning there was your picture in the *Sketch*, and one happened to remember that the firm of Chittuck and Baynes had

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goods—were they always leather, I wonder, Mr. Chittuck?—sent them from the late firm of Ellis and Humphreys, of Endale Street."

"Blast the picture!"

"You are entitled to do so," Brett sympathized. "If I had not happened to be dining at the same little restaurant the night before last and expressed some slight curiosity as to where I'd seen your face before, the letterpress underneath the picture would have escaped my notice, and you would have been spared this visit. As it is, however, there is no reason why it should not be a friendly one. I understand that this is a genuine business of yours, Mr. Chittuck."

"I am doing what you'll tell me I've never done before," was the fierce reply. "I'm making money fast, and I'm making it honestly. We are working overtime, and I've orders enough on the books to last us two years. I've got a good working partner, although he ain't much to look at—a safe, respectable man—and then you come butting in. All along of the little yeller birds, too!"

"You needn't curse them," Brett assured him earnestly. "I don't wish you any harm, Chittuck. Believe me, we aren't a lot of brutes at Scotland Yard. If we see a man who's been off the tracks once or twice settling down and trying to make an honest living, we let him alone. Tell me where to find Matthew, and it's good-bye and good luck to you."

"You mean to tell me straight, you don't know?"

"I don't know."

"You've come down to Norwich just to see me?"

"Entirely to see you."

"Gawd!" the young man muttered.

He drew a stool towards him, perched himself upon it. Then he sat doubled up, his elbows upon the desk, his grimy hands supporting his grimy face, staring gloomily out into the yard. The canary upon his head endeavoured to liven matters up with a few monotonous chirps.

"This is a nice bit of hell," the distracted man groaned. "If I tell you anything about Matthew he'll murder me sure. There's never been an informer yet who didn't get his silencer; and if I don't tell you, I suppose you'll chivy me out of the city."

"We won't consider that possibility, Chittuck," Brett said soothingly, "because you're going to tell me."

The man edged a little nearer to his visitor. His dirty fingers were drumming now upon the desk, his confident, high-pitched voice had deserted him.

"And when you've found him," he demanded, "what about it? What's the good of it all? You can't take him. You know his history. He's been driven into a corner and surrounded a dozen times. The thing's always had the same ending. He never enters a house, walks in a street, or embarks upon a journey without having considered and guarded against every possibility. His means of escape are always there. He'll walk out upon you, and it will cost a few more lives. You leave him alone, guv'nor."

"Don't be foolish," Brett replied, firmly. "It isn't our job at Scotland Yard to let criminals alone, and you know that."

"Then let someone else take on the job. You're a young feller—don't look as though you'd much fight in you, either. Let the old-timers take Matthew on."

"Chittuck," the detective said, and the sternness of his voice was such that the mildness of his appearance was easily forgotten, "there's nothing we folk hate more than to break in upon a man who's trying to lead an honest life. We've got our job to do, though, and that comes first. You've got to tell me where to find Matthew, or to take your chance with us, and you and I both know that that's a slim affair."

Again the young man mopped his forehead with a soiled yellow handkerchief. He slid on to the ground from his high stool and made a careful examination of the room, even raising the blind and looking out of the window into the back yard. Then he returned and stood by the detective's side.

"Fourteen miles from here, mister," he confided—"you can spot it on the map—is a house called Lesser Widerness Hall. It belongs to Lord Fakenham, and it's supposed to have the best shooting that side of Norfolk—seven thousand acres of it. It's been taken by a syndicate. They're there now—and one of the syndicate——"

His voice broke for no apparent reason.

"One of the syndicate," Brett concluded, coolly, "is Matthew?"

"Here's my last word to you," Chittuck declared, moistening his dry lips with his tongue. "Don't you think that he's sitting there like one of my little canary birds, waiting to be asked to hop into your cage. You keep away from Lesser Widerness Hall. I've told you."

PHILIP BRETT perhaps lacked one quality, the quality of caution combined with courage, which goes to the making of the greatest detectives. There seemed to him nothing rash, after a study of the map and a few general inquiries, in driving over towards Lesser Widerness Hall the following afternoon for a preliminary reconnaissance. He had discovered from an estate agent in the city, whom he met at the bar of the hotel, that the shooting and

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Hall were let to a syndicate, the head of which was a Mr. Martin Druce, a wealthy American.

"A stranger to these parts?" Brett had inquired.

The man had shaken his head.

"Not entirely," he confided. "Mr. Druce had the Thursford shooting two years ago with, I believe, the same syndicate. They made a record bag of partridges, too, and didn't do so badly with the pheasants. His lordship was very pleased with the way the shoot was run, and would have liked Mr. Druce to take it on again, but for some reason or other he seemed to prefer Lesser Widerness."

"Interesting old place, I should think," Brett ventured. "Are visitors allowed to see the pictures?"

"In the summer they are. When the house is let for the shooting they're all locked up."

Brett departed with a new thrill of admiration for this man whose capture was the dearest wish of his heart. Before stepping into his car, he glanced once more at a little note in his local guide book, referring to Widerness Hall:—

"*The gem of the collection is, without a doubt, the portrait of Lady Amelia Holcombe, by Gainsborough, which will be found in the South Room. Many critics have proclaimed it the finest existing example of the great artist, and no picture lover should leave the County without an attempt to see it.*"

For ten miles, the way which Brett had traced out upon the map led along the main road to Aylsham. Afterwards he found himself involved in a series of extraordinarily intricate narrow lanes where sometimes the road seemed to disappear altogether. A slight mist was falling when at last a broken-down sign-post, pointing to a rough road on the other side of a white gate, indicated the direction to Lesser Widerness Hall. Brett opened the gate and proceeded cautiously along a track which became suddenly precipitous. Then, without warning, he found it emerge upon a more definite thoroughfare, leading steeply down to a sort of hollow between a rolling slope of common and a belt of thick wood. He drove carefully, negotiated an abrupt corner successfully, and jammed on his brakes with a little start of surprise. On his left was a huge Georgian mansion, with row after row of windows, and a glimpse on the other side of spreading gardens. It was not the sudden appearance of the house, however, which had taken Brett so much by surprise as the fact that he had driven almost into the midst of a typical little shooting party on its way home. There were four or five men in conventional home-spuns, with pipes in their mouths and guns over their shoulders, a couple of keepers, half-a-dozen dogs, two game carts, and a straggling line of beaters carrying long sticks with red flags. Brett suddenly felt every fibre in his body tense. There could be no danger in the middle of a crowd like this, but, nevertheless, he was conscious of his rashness. A tall, athletic-looking man, in dark green shooting clothes, handed the gun which he had been carrying to a keeper, and crossed the road towards the car. With one hand upon the screen, he leaned towards Brett. His lips were parted in what, save for some other and stranger qualities, might well have been a smile of welcome.

"At last, my dear Brett!" he exclaimed. "We expected you yesterday."

MAJOR LAWTON, the Chief Constable of Norfolk, was only too anxious to do anything to oblige Lady Muriel, but her whirlwind arrival had a little staggered him, and the strange story she recounted so breathlessly was a severe tax upon his credulity.

"You must remember, Lady Muriel," he pointed out, "that a county like Norfolk, where everyone is somebody else's neighbour and everybody knows everybody else's business, is the last place in the world where a gang of desperate criminals would be likely to come and hide."

"Not this man," she argued, "not Matthew. Mr. Brett would never have wasted his time coming down here unless he had had some information worth following up. Why should he have disappeared if the gang hadn't got hold of him?"

"His disappearance," the Chief Constable said, "was probably due to entirely natural causes. His car was discovered, as I have told you, at an early hour this morning in a lane leading to Wroxham Broad. We have telephoned the police, and they are searching every place in the vicinity. What probably happened was that Mr. Brett was hurt, staggered off to get help, and collapsed."

"Major Lawton," Lady Muriel persisted, earnestly, "if the car has been found near Wroxham, then I am very certain that Mr. Brett is in another part of the county. Believe me that this is a very serious matter. The gang he is looking for are the people who committed the Warren's Stores burglary, where you remember they killed three men, and if they have got hold of Mr. Brett, I can assure you that he is in urgent danger. There isn't a moment to be lost. The Chief Inspector is coming down himself this afternoon, with two of his special men, but in the meantime we must start a search on our own account."

The Chief Constable frowned.

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had made a few preliminary inquiries," Lady Muriel replied. "I expect they got hold of him whilst he was just looking round."

THEY pulled up outside the archway in the narrow street, knocked at the door of the office, and were admitted by the boot manufacturer himself. The Chief Constable greeted him almost ingratiatingly. There was nothing in the least official about his manner.

"Mr. Chittuck," he said, "this lady and I have come to ask if you would be good enough to answer a question."

The young man threw open the door of his office. He was entirely unsuspicious.

"Come in," he invited, motioning them to precede him. "Now, what is it you want to know, please? How to breed prize-winning canaries, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort," Lady Muriel assured him. "We are in search of a man who has disappeared—a friend of mine. We think that you might help us."

Chittuck's whole manner changed. He endeavoured to be truculent, but there was a scared look in his eyes.

"Why should I be able to help you?"

"Because," Lady Muriel lied blandly, "the last thing my friend told me before he left London was that he was coming to see you to get an address. We know that he came. He probably got it. He has not been heard of since."

"Well, that's nothing to do with me," Chittuck persisted, nervously. "I haven't left these premises for two days."

Major Lawton was beginning to be a little more interested. The man's manner was certainly strange.

"We quite understand that, Mr. Chittuck. You know who I am, perhaps—Lawton, the Chief Constable of the county. This young lady is connected with Scotland Yard. All that we want from you is the address you gave Detective Brett."

"I wish to God people would leave me alone," the manufacturer groaned, looking up at last. "Well, here you are. Brett asked me where a certain person was, and I told him. He is at Lesser Widerness Hall."

"Lesser Widerness Hall!" the Chief Constable exclaimed. "Why, my dear Lady Muriel, that's where Martin Druce's shooting syndicate is. A delightful fellow! He had Lord Thursford's shoot last year—came in to see me only the other day about some licences."

"Is that all you want of me?" Chittuck asked inhospitably.

Major Lawton took the hint.

"That's all, Mr. Chittuck," he said, "and we're very much obliged to you. At the same time, as Brett's car was found near Wroxham, which is in exactly the opposite direction, I don't imagine your information will be of much use to us. Good morning."

Lady Muriel forgot to make her adieux. In the archway she staggered a little, and clutched at her companion's arm.

"Well, that doesn't help us much, does it?" he remarked, cheerfully.

"Major Lawton," she asked, "how long will it take us in your car to get to Lesser Widerness Hall?"

"About three-quarters of an hour. It's an out-of-the-way corner of the world. But why on earth do you want to go there? Brett was evidently on his way to Wroxham, nearly thirty miles in the opposite direction. That's where his car was found."

"It would be," she answered, patiently. "Major Lawton, please have confidence in me and do as I ask. Collect an escort of policemen, get a weapon of some sort for yourself, and come to Lesser Widerness Hall as fast as you can."

The Chief Constable laughed indulgently.

"Well," he conceded, "I'll drive you over there with pleasure, but as to bringing a car load of policemen——"

"Bring as small an escort as you please. I'm not afraid, if you're not, but for God's sake start!"

Her companion compromised. Followed by a single car, containing three plain-clothes policemen, they were soon flying along the Aylsham Road.

"Why did this man Druce come to see you?" Lady Muriel inquired.

"He wasn't sure about licences, and he wanted to be on the safe side. You see, one of the syndicate is a manufacturer in London, and interested in slum work, and he brings his own beaters down for a holiday—twenty of them—and although, of course, Druce pays the keepers belonging to the shoot, he makes very little use of them, brings two men of his own who come over from his place in Hungary. From what I've heard, there's no one can teach him anything about the running of a shoot."

Lady Muriel half closed her eyes.

"My God!" she murmured. "His own keepers, his own beaters! What about the indoor servants?"

"Naturally he has to arrange for them," Major Lawton answered a little stiffly. "I did hear that he'd engaged a butler from Norwich, but the rest came from London. I really don't think you need take this so seriously, Lady Muriel. There is nothing to be alarmed about."

"You think not," Lady Muriel laughed bitterly, "yet—as you'll find out in a very short time—the syndicate is composed

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entirely of criminals, and the beaters and servants are members of the gang."

"In that case," the Chief Constable remarked, with a sceptical smile, "we are going to be somewhat in the minority."

Lady Muriel made no reply. She was deliberately charging her small automatic.

LESSER WIDERNESS HALL, viewed from the main entrance, presented an austere and inhospitable front, with lines of closely-drawn blinds. At the back, however, which was the approach chiefly used, there were some slight signs of movement. One or two of the villagers and two of the gardeners were talking. The resident gamekeeper had just ridden up on his bicycle. He touched his hat to Major Lawton.

"Are the gentlemen shooting to-day?"

"Noa, sir, they ain't shooting that I know on," the man replied, hesitatingly.

The door was opened by a very personable-looking butler in morning clothes. Major Lawton repeated his inquiry.

"The party not shooting this morning?"

The butler stood on one side with a portentous gesture, and they passed into the stone hall. He closed the door behind them.

"No, sir," he replied. "To tell you the truth, sir, the party is broken up."

"Broken up?" his questioner repeated.

"Things has happened here which I don't rightly comprehend," the butler continued, with an air of increasing mystery. "They're mostly, I believe, city gentlemen who have been staying here, and from what I have heard of their conversation, I took it that something must have happened in the city. There was a good deal of telephoning last night, and they all left soon after dinner."

"Where are the rest of the servants?" Lady Muriel asked.

"They've gone too, sir, and the beaters," the man confided. "I'm from Norwich myself. I was paid up quite handsomely, and told to leave to-night, but a queerer business I never knew in my life, sir. You will pardon me, madam," he added, turning to Lady Muriel, "but might this be Lady Muriel Carter?"

"Yes," she replied hastily.

"There is a letter for your ladyship," he announced. "Mr. Druce must have been expecting you, for he left word you were to have it directly you came."

She tore open the envelope and read:—

Lesser Widerness Hall,
Wednesday evening.

Dear Lady Muriel,

Am I right, I wonder? I am imagining that you will arrive somewhere about twelve o'clock to-morrow morning, with a strong escort of Norfolk Constabulary armed to the teeth. Sorry we can't stay to welcome you, but there have been too many of these little affairs already and it is hard to get up an interest in a fight with country policemen. They shoot so badly.

I really could not find it in my heart—yes, I have a heart, Lady Muriel—to be unkind to your ingenuous little friend. He wobbled so innocently into trouble that I should have felt like shooting a sitting hare if I had dealt with him seriously. Besides, although I regret having to bring my visit to such an abrupt end, it has been on the whole a great success. The Gainsborough is all and more than I imagined. It will give me infinite pleasure in the future, unless I make up my mind to sell it. That at present, however, is not my intention. Strangely enough—don't be angry—I find it curiously reminiscent of you as you appeared at the Comtesse de Grignolles's reception. Au revoir!

MATTHEW.

P.S.—How terrible! I nearly forgot what you will doubtless consider the most important part of this letter. If you will go into the South Hall, and press the head of the third oak-carved dryad over the mantelpiece, a door will swing out which leads to the famous Widerness hiding-place. Inside you will discover our little friend, Philip Brett, rather cramped, I am afraid, but otherwise well cared for. It was clever of him to find me, but tell him to try to contrive a less one-sided meeting next time, so that we may really come to an explanation.

They hurried to the South Hall, and the Chief Constable groaned when he saw the empty frame, which had once enclosed the famous picture, hanging upon the wall. The secret chamber was easily discovered, and Brett, unhurt, but pale with suppressed anger, staggered into the light. The Chief Constable helped him out, and looked curiously into the stuffy room. On a rough oaken shelf there still remained a plentiful supply of food, several bottles of wine, and a box of cigarettes, but the walls were three feet thick, and the only ventilation came from an opening into the chimney. He stepped back into the room to find Brett gazing furiously at the empty frame.

"My sincere apologies, Lady Muriel," the Chief Constable said. "All the same, even if the fellow is a desperate criminal, he didn't treat your friend so badly. I see he's still got a bottle of Pol Roger 1911 left."

But, as they knew before night, Matthew's heart was not all kindness; for, at lock-up time, Aaron Chittuck was discovered, shot through the heart, and dead, in his office.

(*Next month: "The Amazing Abduction."*)

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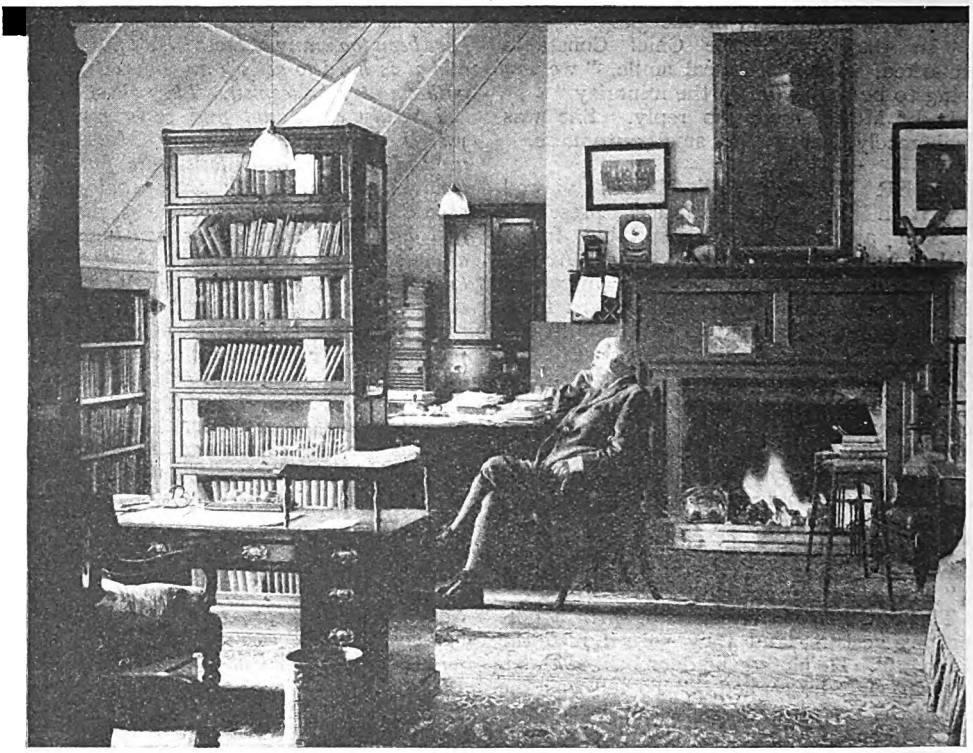

SIR OLIVER LODGE

I.

THE trouble with so many scientists is that they hoard up their knowledge, and then go for a grand slam among the sophisticated few: say, at the annual spree of some learned society. But from the start of his career, far from being "on stilts at a microscope," Sir Oliver Lodge has brought science right to the front door of the ordinary man. In addressing himself to a wide audience, he has had nothing to gain: a sufficiency of this world's goods has pushed mere finance into the background. His position as one of the front-rank discoverers of all time is secure. To-day, as a pioneer in the field of Physics, he is predominant. It was on the results of his research in wireless telegraphy that Marconi built the vast commercial structure which has culminated in the British Broadcasting Corporation; in short, Lodge made "listening-in" possible. And he will go down to history as the great prophet of the Ether of Space. Yet he has chosen to be also a popular teacher of science. That voluntary descent from Olympus has shown the true stature of the man.

Big he is in every way. Six feet three in height, a huge strong body, with a massive head; the only head I have seen like it, in its enormous depth of brain, is the death-mask of Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford. A voice of tremendous resonance and power: a voice to fill the largest hall. He talks to you straight, as it were, from the shoulder; both the grip of his hand and the frank scrutiny of his keen eyes are direct

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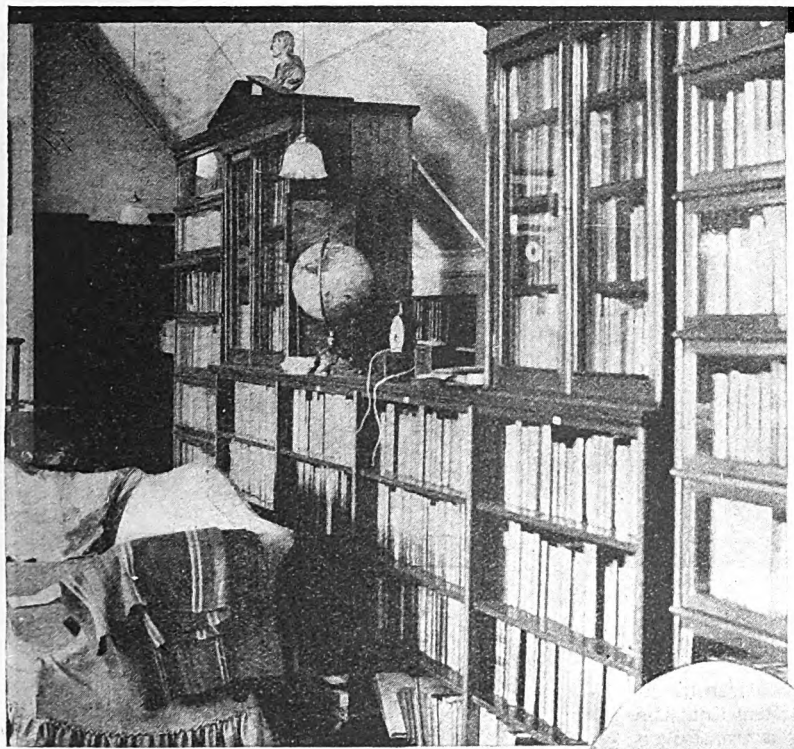


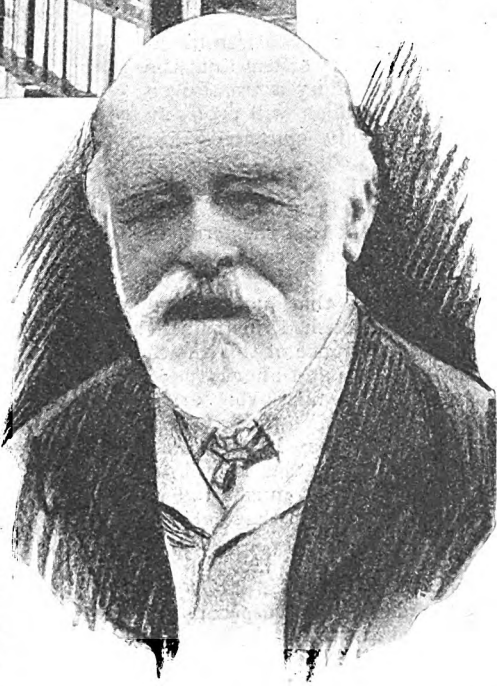
Sir Oliver at work in the library of his house, Normanton, near Salisbury.

Photo: Topical Press.

at HOME

BY

AUGUSTUS MUIR



and artless. Not often do you feel in the presence of a man that curious prehensile essence which springs from authentic supremacy of mind, but with Lodge you are conscious of it at once.

He lives now on Salisbury Plain. In a postal sense, Normanton House is near the cathedral town of Salisbury, but in reality it is a good many miles from anywhere. Stonehenge stands a little way over low rolling hills. This is a district of singular beauty, with these snug green temperate hollows and the sudden inspiring sweep of open spaces that for most folk make the unique charm of the English countryside. By Sir Oliver's garden a river with a resounding weir flows through water-meadows, and its music can be heard in the quietness of the book-lined study that occupies the whole top floor of Normanton House. In a pleasant corner of the garden Sir Oliver has built a revolving sun-parlour, where in good weather he works with his secretary. Even to-day, at the age of seventy-seven, he labours from nine in the morning until

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of the very idea of a University," was for young Lodge a splendid playing-field for mental exertion. Again without tutoring, but with much evening toil, he passed the Intermediate Examination in Science, and gained first-class honours in Physics. He was now twenty-one.

The bright eyes of danger—or at least of insecurity—beckoned; and he took the plunge. He threw up his business career and the prospect of amassing a fortune and came to University College, London, to study. It was a desperately hard fight. He had to support himself by tutoring others in his leisure hours. But he won through. At the age of twenty-six he was a married man and a Doctor of Science; and before he was thirty he was first Professor of Physics at the newly-founded University College in Liverpool.

The grind was ended and the foundations laid. Lodge had now at his call a brain that was a finely-sharpened tool with few equals in England. I have compared his head with Scott's; what Lockhart said of Scott's mental equipment could have been applied to Lodge from this period onward: "He had a command over the powers of his mind—I mean that he could control and direct his thoughts and reflections with a readiness, firmness, and easy security of sway—beyond what I find it possible to trace in any other artist's recorded character and history." For Lodge, at thirty, the grind indeed was at an end. And the romance began.

Since those days he has had something like thirty or forty honours and posts of distinction showered on him, including the D.Sc. or LL.D. of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, Edinburgh, St. Andrews, Aberdeen, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, London, and Sheffield, not forgetting Adelaide and Toronto. But these were only the symbols of a long series of achievements in scientific research. It was at Liverpool that he carried out his pioneering work in electricity. It was at Liverpool, too, that he discovered E. E. Robinson, then little more than a boy, and gave him the job of demonstrator at his lectures. For years E. E. Robinson has been his principal assistant. At his private laboratory at Egham, on the Thames, he now keeps Mr. Robinson busily occupied carrying out research and verifying those facts that he may require for the development of new lines of thought.

III.

IT is a singular pleasure to sit with Sir Oliver in his study and listen to him talking about the things that are so near to his heart. He talks as he writes, with point and an amazingly picturesque facility in words and imagery. Like Bacon, ready to light his torch at every man's candle, he has the knack of illumining his argument with analogies that hit you between the eyes. Take his description of an atom in "Ether and Reality"; it is worth recording: "Fire an infinitely long-range projectile into the sky, and the chances are it will not hit anything. Lord Kelvin reckoned that the chances of hitting anything by such a projectile were about the same as the chance of hitting a bird if you fired a gun at random. That is one of the first things to realize about matter: there are great gaps between the particles. . . . But what about a piece of rock, or furniture, or any solid object? If we could take a solid body and magnify it sufficiently, we would see it something like the night sky." Here we have in one striking sentence an epitome of a great scientific fact — the Discontinuity of Matter.

Now, by experiment it has been proved that matter consists of molecules and atoms. Of course, as Lodge will assure you, they chatted about atoms in Plato's time. But it wasn't until last century that they had many facts to go on. To-day they can even weigh the atom and its component parts. They can also measure it. For instance, a certain spot in a soap bubble just before it bursts is one of the thinnest things known, and this can be measured by optical devices. Two hundred and fifty million of atoms, if placed in a row, will make an inch. "The number of atoms in a pint of water is far greater than the number of pints in all the oceans of the world." That is another of Lodge's swift strokes that sends truth home to the mind with the precision of a hammer.

When he has got you by the buttonhole on the subject of the atom, you can't tear yourself away. "The atom," he repeats, "is mainly empty space, with just a few minute but very active particles pursuing their regular course within it. An atom is more like Salisbury Plain than Fleet Street! . . . Twenty or thirty gnats in a cathedral would not occupy much space. Now abolish the cathedral and leave only the gnats. Let them fly round and round within its quondam walls, and you have a model of what the mental eye sees as an atom of matter." A memorable picture, like all of Lodge's scientific analogies.

It cannot be too emphatically stated that Sir Oliver Lodge is not a Spiritualist. He stands aloof from the movement. He is a member of no Spiritualistic Church; he is a member of the Church of England. But he does believe in the survival of human personality after death. And he does believe

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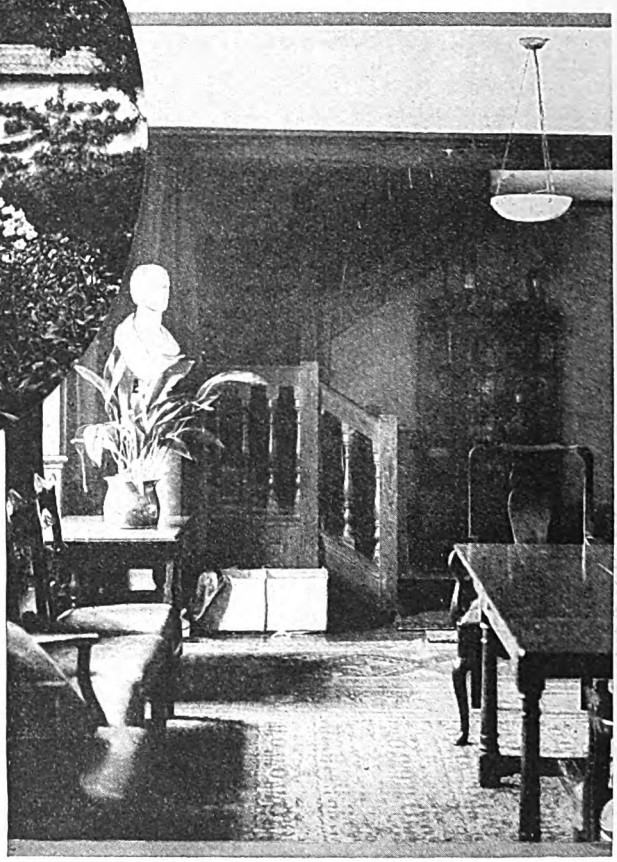
Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge in their garden.



The hall of Normanton House.
Photo: Topical Press.

can of sensory experience. I say I can. A physicist is never limited to direct sensory impressions: he has to deal with a multitude of conceptions for which he has no physical organ."

It has been suggested that telepathy can explain all psychical phenomena. As to the reality of telepathy, Lodge away back in 1883 had no doubts. He told me that he that authentic communications have been received from the dead. Two or three times a year, he told me, he has a talk (through a medium) with his son Raymond, who was killed in the War.

Many worthy folk think that here is the one "blind spot" in an otherwise great mind. The truth is that his psychical interests have been closely linked up with his main life's work. In his early days at University College, London, he was familiar with the ideas of investigators like Gurney and F. W. H. Myers. He thought these ideas stuff and nonsense. However, a little later on he began to study telepathy. In 1889 he received his first convincing proof of survival. It is all down in black and white in Part XVII. of the "Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research," and the subject is further expanded in his book, "The Survival of Man."

"I am as convinced of continued existence on the other side of death as I am of existence here," he says in "Raymond." "It may be said you cannot be as sure as you once asked Sir Rabindranath Tagore whether they believed in telepathy in India. "Believe in it?" exclaimed Tagore. "*We use it!*" But in Lodge's view there are phenomena which telepathy can not explain.

The fact is, of course, that most scientists deliberately ignore what one has called the "whole psychical bag of tricks." They regard the entire business as fanaticism and not quite respectable. But, as Lodge points out, even what is now regarded as the most orthodox science was not always respectable. To early man science sounded like witchcraft. Investigators were burned for prying into

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in mystery: and the business of science is to overcome the forces of superstition."

IV.

SIR OLIVER LODGE is human. Like other folk, he has his foibles and his *bêtes noires*. Those who have travelled with him know that he has an almost laughable horror of losing his luggage. Another foible which is almost a fetish is punctuality—an odd quality for the absent-minded professor of science depicted by comic artists and sentimental novelists. Perhaps this is the result of University routine. Whatever we may look for in a lecturer, we at least expect him to turn up in time on the platform. During half a century of lecturing in University and out of it, I don't suppose Lodge has once been late; and I am sure he has never missed a train in his life.

While some motor-cars break down, Lodge's cars do not. I propound the hypothesis that he keeps the best chauffeur in Wiltshire. For his journeys to and from London there stand in his garage a couple of fast and powerful motors, one of them presented to him by friends in Birmingham as a mark of the good work he did as Principal of the University. In his garden is an old-fashioned, thatched barn, and here is the workshop which makes Normanton House a self-sufficing unit — a sort of electron that scorns an orbit—in the cosmos of Salisbury Plain. I can conceive of no job, from plumbing to locksmithery or the higher flights of bell-hanging, that can't be tackled efficiently in that mechanical Elysium.

But this old-world barn contains more artistic things than electric lathes and blow-lamps. Part of it has been turned into a studio for Lady Lodge. Her canvases that crowd the wooden walls reveal a soul receptive to beauty and intrinsically sympathetic. Indeed, I should say that sympathy is Lady Lodge's first feature. She has infinite patience, and she has needed it. Since she married Sir Oliver fifty years ago, she has had plenty of opportunity for the exercise of that divine quality. "Science is a first-rate piece of furniture for a man's upper chamber," said Wendell Holmes, "if he has common sense on the ground-floor." It was a good thing for Lodge that the ground-floor was so efficiently governed. In the early days when he was completely absorbed by his work, and gripped by the prospector's thrill of discovery, without his wife's guidance he would have developed into a recluse. During those years of tireless effort, it was through her eyes that he saw the world of ordinary things, if he saw it at all. Even to-day his pleasures are bound up with her reactions to all that is simple and jolly and human.

But indeed, until lately, he has extracted little of the ordinary man's pleasure from this life. He has confessed that the attitude of complete immersion in any job is not a permanently satisfying one. It may be a good phase to pass through, as he passed through it. But his outlook is now wider; he has developed. He has come to regard this life as a great adventure —a splendid chance that won't be repeated —a mighty link, as it were, in the unknown chain of eternity. Subjugation to science is excellent, but man cannot live by scientific bread alone. In his luminous book on "Reason and Belief," he exclaims: "A message such as that conveyed to Keats by the song of a thrush may represent a fruitful and a worthy mood:—

"'Oh, fret not after knowledge. I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth:
Oh, fret not after knowledge. I have none,
And yet the Evening listens!'"

Sir Oliver Lodge, Ex-President of the British Association, plays a very good game of croquet. Arnold Bennett once wrote an essay on "Tennis and the Immortal Soul," suggesting that the immortal soul has a thin time of it, considering the amount of solid thought devoted to lawn tennis. With Lodge, recreation has had a thin time. In the old days he played golf at Hoylake and Gullane, and joined Professor Tait in a game at St. Andrews. But now that academic shackles are broken, he is keen to savour all kinds of experience which in his youth he ignored. He wants to know more about music. With Lady Lodge he goes to the Academy, and through her vision enjoys it with all the eager *naïveté* of a student. He has an obvious love for poetry, as his later books reveal. He likes bridge. He has even taken up dancing. At the age of seventy-seven he dances nearly every evening, and he wishes he had started years ago. He finds that dancing "refreshes the machine": it shakes off the day's work and induces sleep. Besides, to be a social animal is one of man's more pleasant duties, but it is still a duty. "All these things count afterwards," he will tell you. And now he takes his amusements as seriously as any boy at a House Match. If you make a dud shot at croquet with Lodge, you'll hear about it! At least, so his sons declare, and they should know.

Lodge is proud of these sons. Four of them are in business; and the eldest, O. W. F. Lodge, is an artist, sculptor, poet, and critic. He lives in Chelsea, and works

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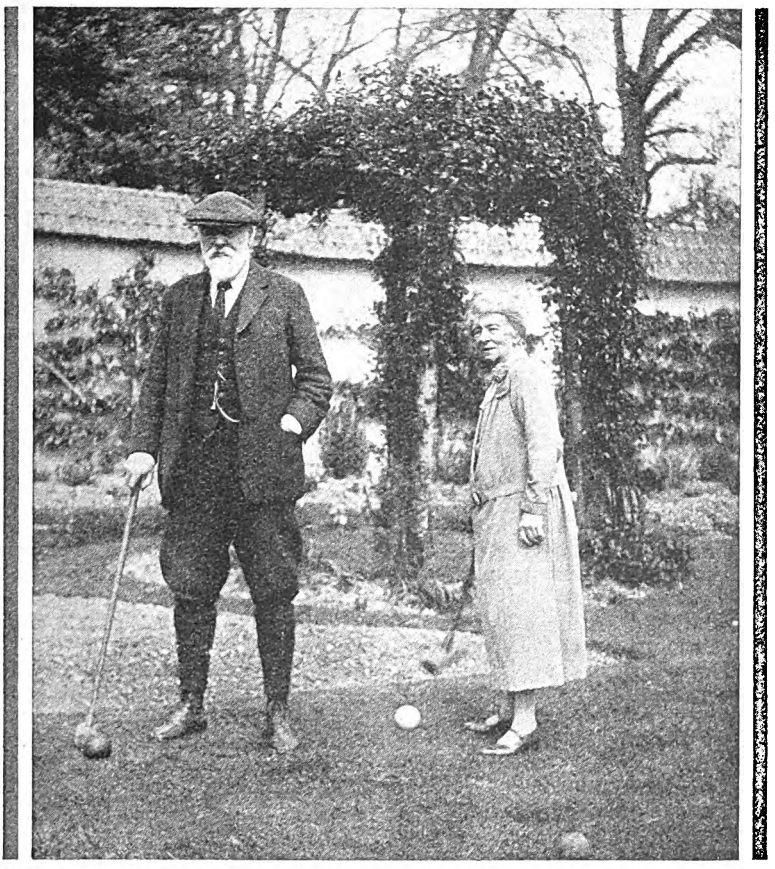

Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge on the croquet lawn.
"If you make a dud shot at croquet with Lodge, you'll hear about it!"

to please himself rather than the public. But the names of F. B. Lodge and Alec Lodge are known to the youngest motor-garage apprentice in the country. The famous Lodge Plug is their production. Lionel and Noel Lodge are in Birmingham at the head of the Lodge-Cottrell Company. About this business there is an interesting little romance. Away back in the early 'eighties Sir Oliver Lodge was making experiments to try to find out why the air above a hot surface was free from dust. He discovered by chance that when a body was electrified, any smoke in the atmosphere above it was somehow cleared and the particles were deposited. Eventually he handed the idea over to two of his sons, who have applied it on a large scale. By the Lodge-Cottrell precipitation process, they extract large quantities of zinc and tin and many tons of valuable dust from the smoke of furnaces and factories. Sir Oliver hoped that some of his sons would make wireless research their life's work. But since they have taken up business, and made a success of it, he is lost in admiration at their engineering and commercial gifts.

However, there is one gift in which the uncommercial father is supreme. Those who have heard Sir Oliver broadcast know his flowing, clean-cut speech, and one of his pleasures is to read aloud to his household. In this way he has read nearly all of Shaw's plays, and I wonder whether he will wade through the latest Shavian tome on Socialism which Rebecca West has called "as big as a brick and as clear as crystal." Marion Crawford, Meredith, Scott, Wells, and Bennett: his liking for these show catholicity. As for P. G. Wodehouse, a new "P. G." is an event at Normanton, as everyone knows who has listened to the chuckling relish with which Lodge declaims the doings of Mr. Mulliner or Psmith.

Like most men whose life has been largely passed in thought, creature comforts do not

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count with him. Food means little; a punctual lunch-bell is more important to him than a point steak. Nor do clothes matter; he likes the old ones best, because, like old friends, they are familiar; and there is an ulster of great antiquity which he insists on wearing in spite of the fissures in its fabric (or perhaps I should say its "discontinuity of matter"). Wistfully and encouragingly, his servant puts out a new one, but the old and comfortable garment is usually called for. As to boots, there's an ancient gnarled beloved pair now known at Normanton as the "Royal" boots, because Lodge's horror-stricken household observed that he had worn them at a luncheon recently given to the Prince of Wales at Oxford. Indeed, an entire absence of self-consciousness is the mark of everything he does. You can't talk with him for ten minutes without realizing that an ingenuous humility of spirit is the quintessence of Lodge.

His detachment of mind is sometimes almost amusing. He has been known to pick up a book, read out passages, and assess their value, only to be told that his own name is on the title page. The moment he completes a book, it is done with—or at least is forgotten as his own handiwork. His mind is incessantly pressing towards fresh problems. I am certain he could not tell you off-hand the scientific discoveries he has made or helped to make. No living man has a more complete knowledge of the history of science; but his attitude towards the immense part he himself has taken is quite impersonal. All the time he is playing for his team, and that team is Humanity, and the game is the advancement of knowledge and the consequent living of a fuller life.

He takes his share in the conduct of village business. With views on education, he is interested in the nearest school; and he is churchwarden in the little church of Willsford, where he often reads the lessons. The genial routine of country life is infinitely pleasant to him after his strenuous years. Both he and Lady Lodge love the fragrant peace of Normanton House. An occasional visit to London or to friends; a dinner at the Authors' Club, and a theatre to follow; a lecture to be delivered somewhere: these are the only breaks in that peace. His daily tramp is to a hill near Stonehenge. He calls it his "Riviera Walk," and he tries to do it in forty minutes. It is part of the day's tranquil task. Old age has brought serenity. He agrees with Browning that "the best is yet to be. . . ." As the decades pass, he declares life grows fuller. His only regret is that he may not have time to fulfil the great programme of work he has planned for his final years. Though, as I have said, he will be known to men of science in future as the prophet and the pioneer of the Ether, he is known to the wide public of to-day as one of our greatest teachers. Of our splendid destiny his message is clear. "Oh, race of men," he cries, "be worthy of your heroes!"

The words that Lodge used about another fit himself: "Out through the tempest he strides, with figure erect, glorying in the conflict of the elements, and summoning the men of his generation to reverence and to worship." Gazing across the plain to Stonehenge, that ancient mystery in stone, we will leave him thinking.

Sir Oliver at work.

Photo: Topical Press.

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The TRAGEDY at ST. TROPEZ

By Gilbert Frankau

Illustrated by
STANLEY LLOYD

I.

"CHI LIN, SIR MARCUS," I read out from the only English "Who's Who" between Toulon and San Raphael. "Knight, Created 1922. Born 1868."

"*C'est lui*," said Kyra "Tell us all it says."

They had burst in on me, my lovely little Roumanian friend and the head of our district Secret Service, while I was breakfasting. But though I could see that both were excited, neither had vouchsafed any reason for disturbing me at so early an hour.

"Sir Marcus," I went on, "has been twice married. The second marriage, to a Miss Selene Wu, took place three years ago. He is childless; and was educated in Shanghai—at a native university. His business is finance. He possesses about twenty English and Chinese decorations. His hobby is yachting. He gives two addresses—one in London and one in Singapore. And now tell me why you require information about this distinguished Oriental at seven-thirty a.m."

"We require it," said Kyra, who can never resist a touch of the melodramatic, "because the big yacht which you and I saw anchor off St. Tropez yesterday evening is Sir Marcus Chi Lin's *Sea Joy*; and because in it Sir Marcus is lying, or rather sitting, dead."

"And he has died," continued the Chef de la Sûreté, who is also a bit of a melodramatist, "in circumstances which are so peculiar, that the gendarmerie at St. Tropez had no option but to telegraph for me."

"Are you going to tell me those circumstances?" I asked.

"We are going to do more than that," smiled Kyra. "We are going to implore your assistance. We need an interpreter, quickly, both to help us interrogate witnesses, and to translate"—she paused, while the Chief drew a paper from his pocket—"this."

"This," handed across my breakfast-tray, proved to be a half-completed letter, headed "S.Y. *Sea Joy*," with the previous evening's date. Addressed, by a queer coincidence, to the head of the firm who are my own London solicitors, and marked "Confidential," it read:—

"*My dear Carthers; I am sorry to trouble you. But on going through the entries in my private pass-book, just received from the Bank of England, I find various cheques—noticeably, one for three thousand pounds, debited on May the seventh—which I cannot recollect having drawn. The pass-book is enclosed. The cheques about which I am doubtful, all of which you will note have been paid to bearer, I have starred with a red cross. As it will be at least six months before I return to England, would you mind going personally to the Bank and inquiring if the clerk who paid over the money for these starred cheques can possibly recollect who——*"

"Who got the money, of course," I explained as I finished my careful translation. "He was writing this when he died, I gather?"

"Yes," said Kyra. "Alone in the yacht's library. They found a half-empty tumbler beside him. We suspect that the tumbler

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contained poison. Fortunately, Doctor Lancart is holiday-making at St. Tropez. He is analysing for us. Now won't you please come and interpret for us, like a dear?"

II.

I CONTINUE repeating, while I remain the chronicler of her adventures, that I am not sentimentally interested in Kyra Sokratesco. Still, she certainly looked her boyish best, bare-legged, in short white skirt and thin jumper, as I took the tiller of my new twenty-knot motor-boat, and we shot out across the blue Mediterranean bay.

"Strange," I remember thinking, "that anyone so attractive should be living alone, in this out-of-the-way part of the South of France. Stranger still, that she should prefer the investigation of what is at best a sordid business, Crime, to the gaieties of Paris or Cannes, of Monte Carlo or her own Bucharest."

For quite apart from the various little mysteries we have investigated together, there is also—about Kyra herself—a mystery. And perhaps a tiny hint of that mystery revealed itself to me when—pardon the pride in my recently-acquired seamanship—I brought my brand-new boat smartly to the lowered gang-plank of the eight-hundred-ton *Sea Joy*, and the three of us went aboard.

There is a way of going aboard yachts—and that way was obviously Kyra's. The captain, a grizzled man in the fifties, with lips like a rat-trap, noticed it immediately. I could see, by the very salute of him, that he was impressed.

"We bring a translator," said Kyra, in her quaint English; and introduced me.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," said the captain. "Nobody on board speaks French, except Sir Marcus's secretary; and his isn't up to much."

The four of us, the skipper leading, retired to his cabin. As we went, I noticed two of the local gendarmes, obviously on guard.

"Tell your friends," said Captain Middleton, once we four were seated, "that nothing's been disturbed. Nobody's been into the library. Mr. Vivian, Sir Marcus's secretary, is just having breakfast. Lady Marcus will see them if necessary. But, of course, she's a bit overcome." Then, "So that there sha'n't be any misunderstanding," he repeated what he knew of Sir Marcus's death.

HIS story was of the simplest. The *Sea Joy* had left Marseilles, where she had called only for food and letters, about eleven the previous morning. The short trip had been uneventful. At eight o'clock they had anchored off St. Tropez. At eight-thirty, dinner had been served to the three passengers. At ten, Sir Marcus had retired to his library. At ten-thirty, his own steward had taken him his usual "grog-tray." At half-past eleven, the same steward—entering to remove the grog-tray—had found him at his desk, dead.

"I advised the authorities at once," ended Captain Middleton. "It's the only thing to do in foreign ports, you see. But I don't know why they're making all this fuss about things. If it's what I think it is, just an ordinary case of heart-failure——"

"Leave him," interrupted Kyra in quick Roumanian, "under that impression. Tell him we want to see first the steward, then the secretary. We're expecting Doctor Lancart. Tell him the doctor is to be brought straight to this cabin as soon as he comes on board."

I transmitted these orders; and could not help being aware, as I did so, of the captain's cold grey eyes, watching first Kyra, then the detective. "He knows more than he'll tell," I decided; and the decision confirmed itself when the steward, straight-faced and very English, came in.

Him, too, the captain watched—anxiously, as though doubtful what he might reveal.

"I prepared Sir Marcus's tray as usual," the steward told us. "Sir Marcus always had the same things—his little whisky decanter, his little ice-bucket, half a bottle of Perrier straight out of the refrigerator, and one glass. I put the tray in its usual place—on the ledge under the port-hole."

"Under which port-hole?" The question came from the Chief. "There are two in the library."

"The starboard one, sir."

"Was it open?"

"Yes, sir. Both port-holes were open."

"He says port-holes." This was Kyra, again speaking Roumanian. "But they're really windows. They give straight on to the deck."

The steward, withdrawing, received the order, "Ask Sir Marcus's secretary to come up." But before the secretary put in an appearance, one of the gendarmes entered without knocking to say, "Il y a Monsieur le Docteur Lancart. He wishes to speak privately"—and the Chief of the Sûreté, followed by Kyra, went on deck.

Alone with me, Captain Middleton's attitude was purely conventional. "A painful business," he declared. "Very painful for everybody—especially Lady Marcus." But when Kyra and the Chief came back to us, I sensed perturbation in him. Nor did the shock seem entirely unanticipated when I translated: "You had better tell him the truth. Sir Marcus was poisoned. Doctor Lancart has no doubt about it. Though by what poison, we do not yet know."

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eleven. " Of course, when the skipper woke me up and told me what had happened, it was a bit of a shock."

But when, at the Chief's bidding, I told him, " Look here, old chap, you'd better know everything ; these friends of mine are practically certain that Sir Marcus was poisoned," his coolness left him—and he could only stammer, " Poisoned. Poisoned. Good God ! "

" This is too ghastly," he said when he had recovered himself. " Has Lady Marcus been told yet ? "

" No." I spoke in English. " Nobody knows except yourself and the captain."

" And nobody shall know," chipped in Kyra—also speaking English ; " until we have made search of the ship." Then, to me in French, she went on. "Ask him if he knows the whereabouts of Sir Marcus's bank-books ; who has charge of the money on board ; and where Sir Marcus usually kept his personal keys."

" Sir Marcus," answered Vivian, " always kept his personal keys on him. You will find them, I imagine, attached to his watch-chain. His bank-books he kept in the middle drawer of the bureau at which he died. The money on board, which was made up to the full two hundred pounds at Marseilles yesterday, is in the safe in the dining-saloon. The safe is a letter-lock one, of which only Sir Marcus and myself knew the combination."

" Write down the combination, please," demanded the Chef de la Sûreté—and after Vivian had written it for him, the search began.

I DID not take part in that search. Neither did Vivian. We sat alone, in the captain's cabin, for the best part of two hours. And it was only towards the end of those two hours that I became aware of Vivian's nervousness ; that it seemed to me that he, in the same way as Captain Middleton, knew more than he would tell. Every now and again, too, he seemed to be on the verge of some confidence ; and once, when I said, " I hope to goodness they don't give me the job of breaking the truth to Lady Marcus," the queerest look betrayed itself in his dark eyes.

" Yes," he said slowly, " that'll be a rotten job, whoever has to do it." And after that a constraint fell between us ; so that I felt glad, almost inordinately so, to see Kyra at the door.

Kyra came through the door, which was curtained, alone. Her mood seemed almost nonchalant. She nodded pleasantly to Vivian, saying, " Excuse us, won't you ? " as she drew me outside. But once outside, her mood, indeed her whole face, changed.

" That man," she said quickly. " Is he a friend of yours ? Have you known him long ? Tell me all you know about him ? Has he ever been in the East ? "

" He was in the East three years, rubber-planting," I began. " He's a gentleman by birth—with a little money of his own, I imagine. A bit of a rolling-stone. But nothing against him. A very ordinary English Public School type."

" Married ? " asked Kyra.

" No."

" *Pour les femmes ?* " (The French phrase is untranslatable.)

" I should say not."

" But no St. Anthony ? "

" Perhaps. Perhaps not. It would depend on circumstances. But what the blazes are you driving at, Kyra ? "

" Hold thy tongue. *Tache da lingura !* " she whispered suddenly—and as she did so the curtain rustled over the doorway of the captain's cabin and a shadow fell between us on the deck.

The shadow was a woman's ; and a whiff of exotic perfume accompanied it ; and a minute later, Vivian, emerging from the cabin, had presented us to his employer's wife.

To write that Lady Marcus Chi Lin was beautiful, would be an understatement. She possessed that rare exquisiteness which is sometimes given to the half-caste ; and her eyes were the almonds of the East. Age, she had none, though I judged her nearing the thirties. Her European yachting-costume was of the simplest ; but pearls worth many thousands glistened at the lotus-flower of her throat.

" I came to find you, Charles," she said, having acknowledged our presentation without a handshake. " My *amah* (maid) tells me that there are policemen on board ; that they are searching all the cabins. Will you please inform me, and at once, why ? "

There was something regal about Lady Marcus ; and we must have stood before her, all three of us, for the best part of fifteen seconds, silent, looking like courtiers—that is to say, like fools. Then, swiftly, before either Vivian or myself could stop her, Kyra said, in that broken English of hers : " We search the ship, my lady, because somebody have poisoned your husband—and we must know who."

What Kyra expected, I discovered later. What I expected was a shriek, a fainting fit. What actually happened was a perfect exhibition of Oriental self-control. Nothing about Lady Marcus displayed the slightest emotion. Hands, lips, eyelids, cheek muscles—every feature, in that supreme instant, might have been carved stone.

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"You are sure of this," she said at last.

"Quite sure, my lady."

"Then find me the poisoner, and quickly, so that he too may die."

III.

ON the Côtes des Maures, where murder is an everyday commonplace, thieving only another name for business, and the coins current of every man's conversation the quarter truth, the half-truth, and the full downright lie, one decency of civilization is nevertheless sacred—and that, the midday meal.

We took ours—Kyra, the Chief, and I—at the villa, all embowered with bougainvillæa, which Doctor Lancart, the famous Parisian analyst, had taken for his holiday, and suddenly converted to his work.

There were test-tubes, and an electric heater, on the side-table of the one living-room; and every now and then the little ferret-eyed scientist jumped up from his *bouillabaisse* to see how the work went on.

"I lack everything," he kept on saying. "The fool chemist here has none of the reagents." And every time he said this, the Chief and Kyra looked at one another—the semblance of a twinkle in their eyes. But whenever they looked at me, their eyes were doubtful; and when, our meal over and coffee on the table, the Chief produced a tiny phial from his pocket saying: "Perhaps this will help you, Doctor. We found it in the yacht's safe while we were searching," I seemed to understand why.

For the phial had a tiny Chinese label on it: and Doctor Lancart, who had practised several years in Saigon, recognized it instantly—and, apart from the dead man, only Vivian ("He was in the East three years rubber-planting," I heard myself say to Kyra) knew the combination of the safe.

Yet that Vivian should be even suspected of such a murder seemed to me an outrage. For though our old School had seen more than one of its alumni in broad arrows, none so far has merited the poisoner's rope.

The doctor, with the contents of the phial to guide him, took a bare half-hour more to reach certitude. "I will perform the post-mortem this evening," he said. "But there is no doubt in my mind as to the result of it. If you can prove opportunity and motive, you need not hesitate to arrest."

And "Opportunity," said the Chief, "was ample. The steward set down the tray by an open window. Motive, too, may be provable."

But because an English boat is English territory, it seemed to me, as I followed Kyra into the sunshine, that he would have to consult the Parquet (the office of the Procureur de la République) before arresting; and, strong in that half-knowledge, I detained the pair of them in the doctor's porch.

"One moment, my friends," I said. "If you want more help from me, if you want me to go back to the *Sea Joy* with you, let us be explicit with one another. Tell me precisely what else you found when you searched this morning—and tell me, very precisely, what you suspect."

The Chief—whose appearance, I repeat, I have promised not to describe in these chronicles—hesitated, murmuring that the position was "a little delicate." Kyra, however, retorting, "Delicate or not, *mon ami*, he knows too much not to know the rest of it," told me the truth.

They had found the bank-book, with the red stars against the doubtful entries, easily; the phial, which was a tiny one, only by supreme luck—wedged, as it had been, between the back and the binding of another book, obviously kept by Vivian, and marked, "Ship's Cash."

"There was the faintest bulge in the back of the binding," said Kyra. "But only the faintest one. As for what we suspect, that is—alas!—obvious. Whether you go on helping us or not, depends—I should say—on your feeling for *him*."

IV.

WHETHER or no I was ethically right in returning to the *Sea Joy*, is open to discussion. That I could not prevent myself doing so, is positive fact. I know Kyra's methods, you see; and I knew, or thought I knew, the exact line she and the Chief would take in their further examination of the man who, whatever there might be against him, had still been my pal.

"Once a pal, always a pal," I remember thinking. "Vivian couldn't possibly have done this thing. And at least I can take care, when they are putting their questions, that they don't lay any trap."

But once we were back in Captain Middleton's cabin, it was not, to my surprise, Vivian, but Lady Marcus whom the Chief, after a low-voiced consultation with Kyra, elected to see.

Lady Marcus entered with perfect self-possession, requesting only that Captain Middleton should leave us before the questions began.

"He was my husband's servant," she explained after he had left us. "And, though he was a most faithful one, I would rather not speak before servants." An

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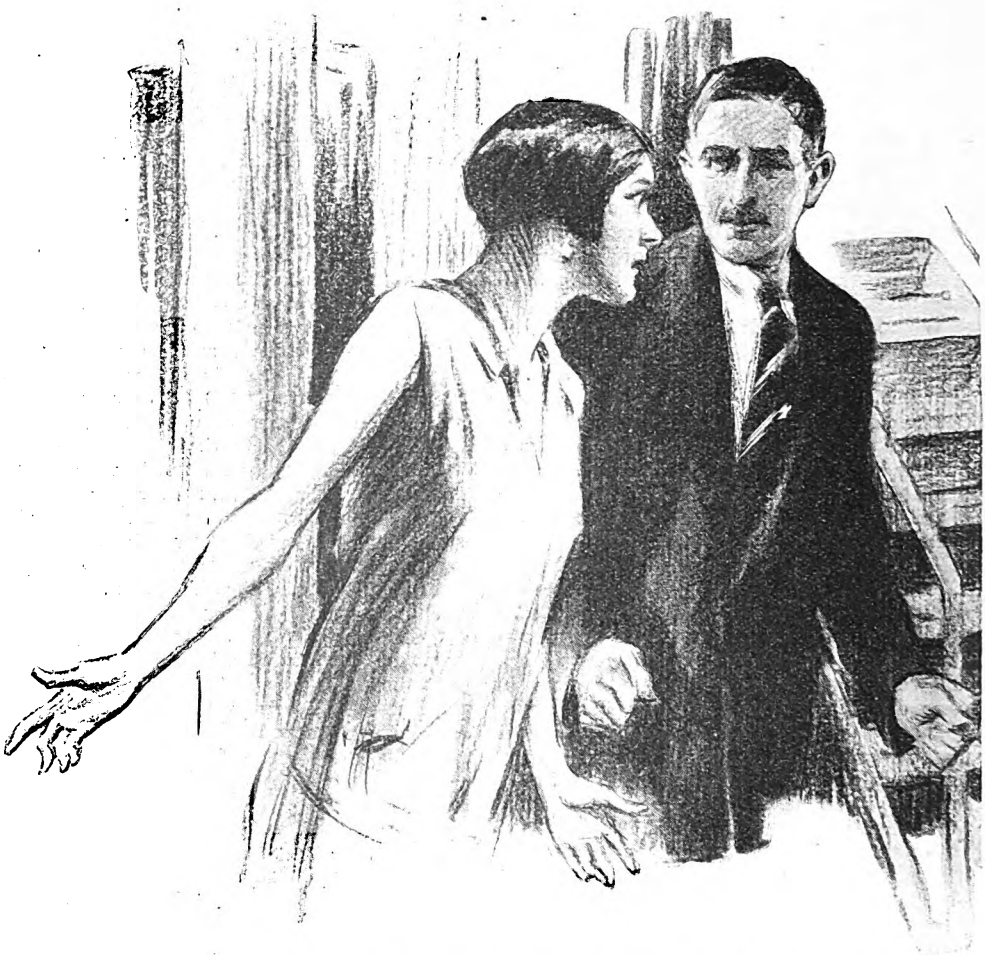

" We search the ship, my lady, because somebody have

explanation which prejudiced me against her from the first.

Prejudice, however—during the hour we had her under examination—was the least of the feelings I experienced about Lady Marcus Chi Lin. That she had a rare beauty, I acknowledge. That she answered my questions freely, intelligently, and with a great semblance of honesty, I acknowledge also. But—to use a forthright vulgarism—she gave me the creeps. And most of all did she give me the creeps when, right at the end, I put the inevitable, " You mustn't be offended, Lady Marcus. But my friends are very anxious to know whether you and your husband have always been on the best of terms ? "

" Always," she asseverated. " Marcus and I adored each other. No other man ever interested me in the slightest. I used to tell Marcus everything. Even when other men tried to flirt with me, even when Charles——"

She bit her lip on the " Charles " ; and I fancied, from a look which passed between us, that she wished me to slur the point over. But Kyra's sharp ears had fastened on it—and in two more questions, the thing was out.

Charles Vivian had been in love with his employer's wife. At any rate, he had tried to flirt with her. She had told Sir Marcus about it. Sir Marcus had wanted to get rid of Vivian. " But I persuaded him not to. Charles was so useful, you see. And when he saw I had no

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poisoned your husband—and we must know who."

intention of—of flirting back at him, he left off."

"Did Vivian know that you had told your husband, Lady Marcus?"

"I'm not certain. He may have."

"And how long ago did this happen?"

"Oh, just before we left England, in May."

Sir Marcus Chi Lin's widow, having made this statement, left us—Kyra and the Chief satisfied, me in gloom.

"A double motive," said Kyra. "Sex—as always. And money—if it was he who cashed the cheques." Then she asked me to fetch Captain Middleton, whom I found just outside the door.

"Ask the captain," she demanded, "to be very frank with us. Has he noticed, since leaving England, anything peculiar about the relations between Lady Marcus and her husband's secretary?"

"Isn't that rather a brutal question?" I protested.

"You need not put it brutally." Kyra's lovely eyes hardened. "But in the interests of justice, we must know."

So I put the question, or rather a series of questions, after my own fashion; and succeeded at last in extorting a very reluctant, "I should say, though of course there was nothing wrong about it, that Lady Marcus was very fond of Mr. Vivian. They used to be a lot together—especially when Sir Marcus was working. I should say, though, that on the whole she liked him more than he liked her."

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Middleton, despite a good deal of quiet pressure, refused to add anything to this statement. "I oughtn't to have said as much as I have done," he protested. "If it hadn't have been for you, I'd have held my tongue altogether. Because I don't trust foreigners. And that's a fact."

Meanwhile "the foreigners"—I could see—had been a little shaken. If one were to believe the captain, Lady Marcus had lied to us. And if Lady Marcus had lied to us——

"She's half Chinese," said Kyra—displaying yet more of that racial prejudice, which is so unfortunate for the internationalist. "If your friend rebuffed her, out of loyalty to his employer; if she wanted to marry him——"

"If she wanted to marry him," cut in the Chief, "she would hardly try to have him guillotined as a preliminary. To me what is really important is that we find out who forged the cheques."

Then, again murmuring about "the delicacy of the position," he asked me if I had any objection to putting a few further questions to Vivian: to which I replied, "None at all. Provided the questions are fair ones—and provided that you will do nothing more than keep him under surveillance until we have had time to communicate with my solicitor, Mr. Carthers, who will probably come over personally when he knows what has occurred."

The Chief demurred—as I had expected him to. Kyra, however, took my side, saying, "Our position, too, is a little delicate. Whoever we arrest may claim the right to be tried in England"; and I got my way. Also, knowing the irregularity, to English ideas, of Kyra's and the Chief's methods, I insisted on being allowed to warn Vivian of what he must expect.

HE came in a little later; perturbed, but not unduly so considering the circumstances; and I warned him that, Doctor Lancart having confirmed the fact of the poisoning, everybody on the yacht was bound to be more or less under suspicion until the matter had been cleared up.

"Including myself?" he asked.

"I'm afraid so, old chap."

"Well, it's natural, I suppose. Though, of course, *you* must know I didn't do it. With Sir Marcus dead, I'm left with about a hundred-a-year and my wound-pension. Tell your friends to keep that in their minds, won't you? And now, fire ahead."

I translated—and put the Chief's first question. "You kept the yacht's cash-book. The cash-book was in the safe of which you gave us the combination. Are you quite sure that nobody except yourself and Sir Marcus knew that combination?"

"I'm very nearly positive. Sir Marcus had it changed before we left London."

"Could Lady Marcus have known it?"

"No." Vivian answered instanter. "Certainly not."

"He told us before luncheon"—it was still the Chief, note-book on knee, speaking—"that Lady Marcus went to bed at about ten-thirty; he himself at eleven. Ask him if he can remember his movements during that half-hour."

"I remained in the saloon," answered Vivian, "reading—one of your books as it happened, old man. When I'd finished it I turned straight in."

Half-a-dozen questions, all more or less along the same lines, followed. Then, abruptly, Kyra took a hand.

"*Je pense*," she said, speaking French very slowly, and looking towards Vivian as she did so, "that you had better tell your friend everything, in your own manner. What we have discovered, we have discovered. It is for him to explain it—if he can."

"Everything?" I asked.

"Yes. Everything. You made a condition that the examination should be a fair one. Could anything be fairer than to tell this gentleman about the letter, about the pass-book, about the little phial we found, and"—Kyra, still looking at Vivian, spoke more slowly than ever—"about Lady Marcus's statement that he flirted with her, and Captain Middleton's statement that it was she, rather, who flirted with him?"

A silence followed; and during that silence I saw Vivian change colour; saw one little greasy bead of perspiration break out on his cheek.

"Could anything be fairer?" repeated Kyra.

"I—I suppose not," I admitted—and for a good ten minutes, feeling as uncomfortable as I have ever felt in my existence, I spoke with Vivian as only one man of the same race can speak to another, when there is need.

He heard me out unflinching; but I was aware, as I explained about the cheques and the poison-phial, of stark amazement in him; and when I came to his relations with Lady Marcus, of fear. After I had finished, he was like a man stricken with aphasia. His lips moved—but for many seconds he could not speak.

"What—what the hell's a fellow to do?" he said at last. "You say you're going to write to Carthers. You needn't. I cashed that bearer cheque for three thousand on May the seventh. The others, too. I

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always cashed his cheques for him. But they were all right. Sir Marcus signed them, and he had the money for them. As for the poison, I swear to God I never even knew he had been poisoned, till you told me this morning. And there's nothing between me and Lady Marcus. Nothing, I tell you. Nothing on earth ! "

And Vivian, his grey eyebrows twitching, added : " For God's sake believe me, old chap. Because—because any fool could see that those two don't."

V.

I THINK, looking back a whole year on what was at best a sorry business, that I—even though I obeyed the Chief's order and kept away from the *Sea Joy*—always did believe in Vivian's innocence. But that evening, as Kyra and the Chief and I sat on my terrace watching the lights of St. Tropez glimmer across two miles of silent water, my belief in him may have been a little shaken. And two evenings later, when I sat in the same place with Carthers, arrived post-haste from London, it was more shaken still.

" I can't agree with you," said Carthers. " The sex-motive, though obscure, seems ample. He admits he cashed the cheques. Whether they were forged or not, is immaterial. He could easily have induced Sir Marcus to sign them. And nobody had a better opportunity of dropping this poison, which is apparently odourless, into the glass."

" Circumstantial evidence," I protested.

" More than that. The discovery of the phial——"

" Proves nothing. He could far more easily have dropped it overboard."

" But he didn't. He was afraid of its being washed ashore. And to-morrow, whether for trial in France or for extradition, he'll be arrested."

Whereupon Carthers, tired with his twenty-four-hour journey, went up to bed.

I went up to bed, too. But there was no sleep in me. I just sat at my window—staring, staring, staring at the riding-light of the *Sea Joy*. And as I stared, my brain worked, and my blood shrank back into a heart sick with apprehension—till on a sudden, I saw the other light.

The other light was dead under the *Sea Joy's* riding light, almost at water-level. It winked—and kept on winking. Till presently, I began to read.

" G.F." read the light. " G.F. S.O.S. G.F." And when I had got my own torch, it signalled : " S.W.I.M.M.I.N.G. C.O.M.E. S.H.O.R.E."

My Morse, after ten years' disuse, was rusty. But I remembered the O.K. ; and sent it ; and five minutes later I stole—stole is the only word for it—out of my house.

It is no distance, if you take the path over the golf-course, from my house to the Beauvallon foreshore. But the moon was still up—so I went by the pine-woods ; telling myself that there could be no hurry, because Vivian's swim from St. Tropez would take him, even if he made it, at least an hour.

I remember how, as I reached the foreshore, I was afraid he might not make it. I remember wondering whether I should get my boat out, and being afraid again—lest the boat should betray us to some watcher. In fact, I was in a pretty panic by the time the last rays of moonlight showed me the shadow of Vivian's swimming head.

He shivered as he came out of the warm water ; and the breath whistled through his teeth.

" Good of you," he whispered. " I thought you'd be coming on board again. I tried to write you. I tried to come over this afternoon. But those gendarmes wouldn't let me. Haven't got a spot of brandy, have you ? I—I'll need it before we talk."

There is always drink, and a change of clothing, in my boathouse. I led Vivian there ; found him flannels and a sweater ; and set drink before him—in the dark.

" Carthers must be here," he began. " I overheard some talk about the *avocat anglais*. Does *he* think I'm guilty ? "

" He——" I hesitated.

" All right." The teeth had ceased their chattering. " You needn't make any bones about it. I'm as good a judge of evidence as the next fellow ; and Selene——"

" Selene ! "

" Lady Marcus. Hell holds no fury, old chap ! You know the rest of the quotation. But thank your stars you don't know what it means to a fellow, when he can only hold a thousand-a-year job by playing Joseph to a half-caste. . . ."

He told me exactly what holding such a job meant ; but because that part is real life, and not fiction, I have cut it out.

" One couldn't tell that to a jury, could one ? " he ended. " At the best, they'd only think she and I were accomplices. And besides, there's no earthly proof. The letter was too well forged, you see. And poor old Marcus'll never let on now, how she wheedled the combination out of him. Or what he did with the three thousand, either. And, and, oh damn it, Gilbert, what's the use of pretending ? I loved her—even if I wouldn't behave like a blackguard to poor old Marcus. I love her still even if she is trying to have me

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guillotined. And that's why—that's why *you've* got to help me. Because nobody else can."

MY wife, usually the most tractable of women, found it almost impossible to forgive me the loss of our brand-new twenty-knotter. Carthers, to whom, from the very moment the theft was discovered, she never ceased appealing, "Would any man in his senses leave a motor-boat which cost a thousand pounds lying about loose with enough petrol in her tanks to cross the Mediterranean?" contented himself with a malicious, "No doubt, Mrs. Frankau, your husband's loss will be made good by his insurance company." The two gendarmes on board the *Sea Joy* lost their chances of promotion. The Chef de la Sûreté, after one of the most fruitless inquiries in police history, departed for Toulon. And Kyra—whose friendship, though always platonic, is always precious to me—sulked like a spoiled princess.

"Never again, my friend," said Kyra, sulking, the night after the *Sea Joy* had sailed for England, in my library. "Me you cannot fool. How it was done, I know not. But you had a hand in it. And he was guilty. He merited the death-penalty. His flight alone proves it. Though she, too, that sly one, is not altogether blameless. In all crime where there is a sex-motive——"

"Sex-motive," I interrupted. "Or race-motive." And because any Boswell may be proud of out-distancing his Doctor Johnson, I could not help feeling a little superior as I took a thin book printed on vellum from my pocket, and read the first paragraph of that thousand-year-old story which begins: "In the great walled city of Soochow, lived Wong Whei Yui, the rich old merchant; and his lovely young wife, Peach Blossom, and Wen Chen Ming, the servant of Wong Whei Yui, who was also his friend."

"What on earth?" began Kyra.

But I silenced her, and read on.

"Now the young wife of Wong Whei Yui," I read, "fell amorous of Wen Chen Ming, who would have none of her. But Wong Whei Yui, not knowing this, imagined that Wen Chen Ming had betrayed him. And because, in that age which the scribes of Far Cathay call golden, no man might kill with his own hand, however great the wrong suffered; and because moreover it seemed to Wong Whei Yui that life without the love of Peach Blossom were better ended, he ended his life—doing so in such a way, for he was a man of great cunning, that suspicion for his death should fall upon his friend. And after Wong Whei Yui's death, Peach Blossom, about whom the story is told, being still angry with Wen Chen Ming, who had rebuffed her, forgot that it is written, 'Who does not help the innocent is himself guilty.' And she——"

I did not, however, succeed in finishing that thousand-year-old story; because Kyra snatched the book from me; and when she had re-read those opening paragraphs, picking her way very slowly through the quaint English, her face lost something of its loveliness—going, indeed, almost grey before my eyes.

"Did—did *he* know this?" she stammered.

"Wen Chen Ming thought Peach Blossom guilty," I answered.

"And you?"

"The book only came yesterday."

"Then why?"

"Why what, Kyra?"

"Why did you—why was your motor-boat——"

"Sheer carelessness, Kyra."

"You—you needn't lie to me. He was your friend——"

"Sheer carelessness, I repeat, Kyra."

"No. No. No. It wasn't. It was——"

And before I could quite realize what had happened, Kyra had seized both my hands and was kissing them, sobbing as she did so: "Providence, Gilbert. Providence! God forgive me. It was suicide. And I—I'd have had an innocent man guillotined for it, just—just to keep myself from being bored."

Which last, though a trifle disingenuous on Kyra's part, is no bad reason for becoming a detective—or for reading about one, if it comes to that.

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The Way Out

By

W. TOWNEND

Illustrated by
W. R. S. STOTT

"YOU say the *Arpella* will be here a week longer?"

"More likely a fortnight. Count how many ships beside us there are waiting to go under the elevators!"

Captain Ridley sighed. The anxiety in his face became despair.

"Man, it's a terrible position for any father to be in. We're sailing to-morrow night and I'm leaving my boy at the mercy of a girl like that, knowing there's no chance to keep 'em apart. And what can I do? Nothing! You'll help me, Captain Crupper, won't you?"

"If it's possible," said Captain Crupper. "Gladly."

When Captain Ridley had gone ashore he rested his elbows on the rail and stared at the white buildings of Buenos Aires and smoked his corn-cob pipe and thought.

The chief engineer, wiping his hands on a piece of waste, approached from the direction of the engine-room alley-way.

"Jock, are you satisfied with that third engineer of yours?"

"Aye. Jim Ridley's a guid lad. Wi' experience he'll likely make a guid engineer."

"His father's been on board. He's captain of the *Rose of Aragon*."

"The passenger liner, loadin' in Number Four Dock, eh?"

"Yes. To-morrow she shifts to the North Basin to pick up her passengers."

"Young Ridley is j'inin' the firm next year as soon as he gets his chief's ticket. So he tells me."

"His father's worried to death, almost. The lad's fallen for a dancing girl that's working in that *café* that used to be known as George's Bar before they rebuilt it and turned it into a dance hall. Remember it, Jock?"

"Aye, I dae. An' the girl's there, is she? If young Ridley has a fault it is that he thinks a' women are guid an' pure, angels, in fac'. An' he at sea! What is she? Argentine?"

"English. Jock, will you come ashore to-night? I want to see what kind of girl the third's in love with."

"You surely dinna think there's ony chance you'll approve of her, Johnny?"

"Not a chance. But I promised old Ridley I'd have a talk with the girl and find out, if I could, how far this business had gone."

"Are ye crazy, Johnny?"

"Sometimes when I land myself in for trouble like this, Jock, I'm inclined to believe I am."

HOW much alike all these dance halls were, thought Captain Crupper. The pattern was universal. Amusements ashore, the world over, had been standardized, like ships and women's dresses and men's hats and motor-cars and drinks.

By gracious favour of the management and the extravagance of a five-dollar tip to the magnificent head waiter, he and the chief engineer sat at a table adjoining the polished dance floor, where presently the girl who had snared the poor third engineer would appear with another girl and sing and dance. A sister act, standardized also, Captain Crupper had gathered, but passable, all things taken into consideration.

The place was crowded. Floor and

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balcony alike. And the people present represented every class of society. Lack of money was the only bar to admittance. At the tables near by sat girls in evening frocks, with small, close-fitting hats on their dark bobbed heads, pale silk stockings, frankly revealed knees, high-heeled shoes—again the pattern, reflected Captain Crupper—standardized: their faces powdered, their lips scarlet: and yet nice girls, no doubt. There was no reason to think otherwise. Some of the men wore dinner jackets, most their ordinary day clothes, lounge suits and tweeds. And without exception, or so it seemed, everyone drank champagne at twenty-four pesos a bottle.

A pleasant enough spot, decided Captain Crupper, and though expensive, respectable, which was more than he had expected.

"Her name's Phyllis," said the chief engineer.

"You've heard of her, then?" said Captain Crupper.

"Aye. I asked the second."

"Is the third here?"

"No. It's his nicht on board."

The orchestra was playing, as a novelty, apparently, a tune Captain Crupper had heard in England and New York and Marseilles and Naples, and on board ship in the galley where the cook and the steward sang mournfully to the mess-room lad's accompaniment on a mouth-organ. Two girls, one fair, the other dark, in frocks no shorter than the frocks of the women in the audience, came hand in hand on to the polished dance floor and sang. When the song had ended, they danced a wildly eccentric dance that was greeted with roars of applause.

"I saw that done in London last year," said the chief. "An' far better, tae. Thon's the lassie: the thin yin wi' the fair hair."

"I'm glad, for the sake of the third's judgment, anyway," said Captain Crupper.

"Aye, she's the mair presentable o' the pair," said the chief. "The ither's a hardened auld trouper by the look of her: she'd be forty at least! Caperin' aboot at her age."

"Her name's Phyllis, is it?" said Captain Crupper. He studied her curiously as she and her partner sang for the second time. She was a pretty girl, very slim and lissom and graceful, with a startled, shy air, and nimble feet, and a charm of manner that seemed, somehow, wasted before such an audience and in such surroundings. He wondered, doubtfully, why a girl who had, it seemed, more than the average amount of talent, a passable voice, a sense of humour, good looks, elegance, should be here, in Buenos Aires. Her looks owed nothing to her make-up: she was young: far too young to have left home. He was puzzled and uneasy, and he wished with all his heart that Captain Ridley had not asked him to interfere.

The second song and its dance had ended like the first in wild and rapturous applause. The two girls bowed, laughed, and vanished. The orchestra struck up a fox-trot and men and women in the audience rose from their tables to dance.

"An' hoo are ye gaun to set about persuadin' the lassie she's no richt to trap the third engineer into marriage?"

"It's not her fault, Jock," said Captain Crupper.

The chief engineer clucked his tongue.

"Is that a fac'? Aye, there speaks the free an' unprejudiced observer! Johnny, ye've an open mind. I'm thinkin' I wudna' be in your shoes the noo. But, Johnny, look! The girl's comin' this way: if ye want to speak to her, grab her!"

THE slim, fair girl was strolling slowly between the crowded tables, glancing nervously, it seemed, from side to side, greeting acquaintances with little, shy nods or waves of her hand, pausing occasionally and speaking, but refusing always to sit down and drink, and when pressed smiling and walking on once more with the air of one whose mind is occupied with matters of grave importance.

"She makes a commission on every bottle o' champagne that's bought for her," said the chief.

"The old game," said Captain Crupper. "Sometimes they pocket the corks as proof of the business done. Lord! I hate to see a young girl earning her money like this."

"Why dinna ye call her, Johnny? She's near enough now to hear ye."

Captain Crupper shook his head. His task had even more difficulties than he had anticipated.

"I can't," he said. "It wouldn't seem right, somehow."

"A-weel, there's ithers not so particular. Look!"

At the next table there sat by himself a young man in a dinner jacket and black tie. He had glossy black hair, brushed back from his forehead, dark, watchful eyes that seemed to miss nothing of what went on, thin, expressive lips, a dark complexion. He was, thought Captain Crupper, the kind of man some women, their tastes nursed by the moving pictures, would consider beautiful, the model of all a man should be.

The manager, he also wore evening clothes, with a white tie, stood by the young man's side and talked to him in Spanish, and was altogether subservient and respectful.

The young man listened, it seemed, half-

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heartedly. The manager's conversation must have bored him. From time to time he would answer in monosyllables. Once he stifled a yawn and glanced at the platinum and diamond watch on his wrist. And then suddenly he leaned forward in his chair. His face lit up and became animated. His eyes widened. He smiled and touched the manager on the arm, and said something in a whisper. The manager turned and looked at the girl who had danced and beckoned imperiously, as one who would be obeyed without question.

The girl drew near, swaying a little from her hips, her blue eyes disdainful in their regard, her pink lips set tight. She looked, thought Captain Crupper, sullen and angry, and almost, one might have said, terrified.

A girl like that! Why?

"She's actin'," said the chief engineer.

Captain Crupper was all at once not so sure.

The manager, smiling broadly, took her by the hand and introduced the sleek young man, who jumped to his feet and bowed from the waist.

"Daes he wear corsets, dae ye think?" said the chief.

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Captain Crupper.

The sleek young man drew out a chair and the girl seated herself listlessly.

"What is it?" she said.

"Till this minute," said the sleek young man, "I have never lived."

"You needn't say it," she said. "I've heard it before."

A waiter appeared and the sleek young man ordered champagne.

"Would you like somezing to eat?" he said. "Do!"

"It would choke me," said the girl.

"You sing well," said the man. "And your dance, how wonderful! Have you learned in Paris?"

The thought came to Captain Crupper that never before had he seen a young girl quite so unhappy. Hope had gone.

The sleek young man with the beautiful features leaned forward across the small table and spoke in a low voice, so low that it was impossible, even by straining one's ears, frankly, without shame, to overhear what he was saying. He tried to take the girl's hand in his, but she drew back quickly, as though his touch would be contamination.

When the champagne was on the table, he filled her glass. He pressed her to drink. She shook her head.

The sleek young man, apparently not in the least offended or discouraged, laughed. He said:—

"Pheelis, I drink to your blue eyes. You are lovely, you do not know, my dear!"

The girl drooped. She seemed exhausted.

Captain Crupper sighed. He glanced sideways at the chief engineer, whose plump, good-natured face had lost its usual placidity and contentment. He, too, was worrying.

Things couldn't go on as they were, thought Captain Crupper. They just couldn't. No question about it. And yet what could he do?

As a family man, with daughters of his own, it was his duty to save this girl. No one with any sense of decency could stand by and see a young girl tormented and made love to by a man like the sleek young man, whose very appearance implied danger. A foreigner, with a foreigner's ideas on women. For even in his own country the sleek young man was, to Captain Crupper, a foreigner.

"Jock," he said, "do you see?"

"Aye, I see."

"Ever seen a dog worrying a kitten?"

"Aye. I've seen the dog scratched."

"Not often, Jock."

"No, Johnny, ye're richt in that—not often!"

The young man had hold of the girl's hand at last. He whispered eagerly. The girl drew back, her face white under her make-up, her child's blue eyes expressing disgust and fear mingled.

CAPTAIN CRUPPER sighed and rose to his feet.

The chief engineer plucked at his arm.

"Johnny, dae ye want a knife in your gizzard?"

"No, Jock. But I'll be all right, I promise."

"They're a hot-tempered lot, these Argentines!"

"You know me well enough to know I'm strongly opposed to violence, always. I'll manage."

He moved slowly across to the table where the girl and the sleek young man sat.

"Good evening," he said, and smiled in what he hoped was a fatherly way. "I'm glad to see you again, Phyllis. How are you?"

He held out his hand. The girl was startled. And then the fear lifted from her eyes: her pink lips twitched in a smile, and she snatched her hand from the young man's clasp.

"How do you do?" she said.

"What do you want?" said the young man, sullenly.

"This young lady is from my home." Vague, perhaps, but correct; for whether home was London or Liverpool, the north or the south, the east or the west, Wales or Scotland, Belfast or Birmingham, or where, he neither knew nor cared. The designation

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The sleek young man leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

covered the case completely. " Were they all well when you last heard, Phyllis ? "

She nodded. " Yes," she said, in a faint little voice, " all well ! " and looked at him anxiously, just as though she asked herself had she, after all, met him somewhere and had she forgotten ?

" I don't know whether you ought to be here," said Captain Crupper. " When I knew I wasn't exactly pleased. Being abroad isn't like being at home, in your own country. Understand, Phyllis."

The sleek young man said, sharply :—

" I zink you have ze nerve of ze devil ! "

" Indeed ! " said Captain Crupper. " And when I want your views, young man, I'll ask for them. Until then I'm not interested." He spoke once more to the girl, leaning with his hands on the table. " Phyllis, would your parents like you to be talking with strange men ? "

" No," said the girl, softly. " But can I help it ? Do I look as if I was enjoying myself ? I hate it."

" This young "—he was going to say " man " and changed the word—" this young gentleman, is he a friend ? "

" I've never seen him before in my life. I think he's detestable."

There were tears in her eyes.

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thought Captain Crupper, that the sleek young man was in his own mind all that he himself was not. He was of the higher breed that knew no law. The girl was his. He would have her.

AND by now the discussion, carried on at first in low voices that had gradually grown louder and louder, had attracted the attention of the people seated at the tables near. The two men, the handsome, well-set-up young man in evening clothes, and the lean, wiry little man in the blue suit, with the strange penetrating grey eyes and the tanned face and sandy hair, stood frowning at each other. No two men in all that room could have offered a greater contrast. The pale-faced, drooping girl, the dancer, seated at the table, her demeanour expressing dejection and fear, added a breathless interest to the scene. The chatter of voices and the laughter had died down to a murmur, silenced by this unexpected and most welcome variation of the night's pleasure.

Dancers came hurrying off the polished floor to watch and listen and exclaim inquiringly.

Captain Crupper said in his mild way :—

" I don't care for either your language or your manners. You may have lived in England. I'd like to know where. I could make suggestions, but I won't, not now, not wishing for trouble. I can't stop, as I have this young lady to look after, but I can tell you this : I'll have great pleasure in returning later and telling you one or two things about yourself that will surprise you."

The manager bustled up, followed by the head waiter and two large, uniformed attendants. He spoke in Spanish to the sleek young man, who shrugged his shoulders and indicated first Captain Crupper and then the girl, throwing tremendous, unspeakable contempt into his gestures.

The manager turned fiercely on the girl.

" Go to your dressing-room," he said in English. " I will talk with you, miss."

" Phyllis," said Captain Crupper, " you'll stay where you are. You're in my care."

" You ! What you do, interfere and make trouble ? " said the manager. " You may go. I no' want you here."

Captain Crupper, conscious of the silence and the people crowding around them, watching, leering, smiling, waiting, knew that unless he took care, great care, he would find himself once more engaged in a fight, against all his inclinations ; for, at heart, he was a man of peace.

" I'll go, certainly," he said. " I don't want to stay. But I'll take this young lady home with me."

" You will do nozzin' the kind ! She is under contrack ! "

" Contract be damned ! " said Captain Crupper. " She's under age, or I'm a Dutchman ! What's more, contract or no contract, I won't permit her to remain in a place where she's insulted by men like that ! "

He jerked his head in the direction of the sleek young man who scowled at him.

A voice with a broad Lancashire accent called out :—

" Give the dago a poonch in jaw, la-ad ! "

And from then on Captain Crupper became, as he afterward acknowledged, the unconscious Instrument of Destiny, the Plaything of Fate.

" I have you t'rown into ze street," said the manager. " I have you arrest ! "

He thrust his face close to Captain Crupper's and puffed out his cheeks and closed his eyes.

" I'm not going to fight," said Captain Crupper, " but a man's got to have room to breathe."

So saying, he placed the palm of his right hand on the manager's face and, exerting a certain amount of strength, shoved. The manager was hurled into the arms of one of the uniformed attendants who held him up.

Captain Crupper spoke to the girl.

" Come on, Phyllis, let's go ! "

The girl stood up. Captain Crupper stretched out his hand to her.

The sleek young man said sharply :—

" Wait ! " and without further warning struck with his fist.

Captain Crupper moved swiftly back and the girl, darting forward between him and the sleek young man, took the blow on the side of the face and dropped in a huddle on the floor. Captain Crupper stepped over her and hit the sleek young man on the point of the chin, and the young man fell, taking with him the table with its load of glasses and bottles and silver and the pink-shaded electric lamp.

The chief engineer shouted loudly :—

" Mind yersel', Johnny ! They're efter ye ! "

Captain Crupper had turned to lift the girl when the two uniformed attendants attacked him.

One he sent reeling backward with a quick left-hand punch on the nose, but the other, a large, stout man, flung his arms about him and tried to throw him.

Captain Crupper hit him in the stomach with his left and wrenched himself free in time to meet another rush from the sleek young man, whom he side-stepped nimbly and uppercut. As the young man collapsed he glanced over his shoulder to the left and saw with grim amusement the chief engineer and the manager and one of the waiters

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to everyone, fighting and carrying on? 'Ere, that's my partner! Phyllis, where's he takin' you?"

"You mind your own business!" said Captain Crupper.

"It is my business. 'Ow can I dance without her?"

Captain Crupper saw the police entering the *café*.

"For Heaven's sake, girl, get us out of this through a side door, or something! She's fainted!"

As he followed the dark-haired girl he heard the breaking of glass, the cries of anger in Spanish, and the wild, enthusiastic shouts of seafaring men fighting happily, and the more restrained clapping of hands from tourists enjoying their first glimpse of life in a foreign country, and he wondered whether the chief engineer would be arrested and what he would have to say to him when next they met on board the *Arpella*. Had it been feasible he would even now have gone to his help.

IN the taxi the girl revived. She opened her eyes and said in a low whisper:—

"Where on earth am I?"

"You're quite safe," said Captain Crupper. "There's no reason to be scared."

"I'm not," she said. "Not with you." For a moment she was silent. He sat with one arm supporting her slender body. She did not move. "You got me away, then. Someone hit me."

"Yes," said Captain Crupper. "I got you away."

She sighed and raised her head from his shoulder and looked at him in the obscurity of the dark cab. By the flash of light from a street lamp he saw the bruise on her cheek, her round, wondering eyes, her fair, short hair.

More than ever did she seem to him a child.

"Listen to me," he said. "You can't go back!"

"No," she said. "I can't go back. I don't want to." He felt her shiver. "I don't want to. I hate the place."

"How long have you been in B.A.?"

"Two weeks."

"Why did you come here?"

"To work."

"By yourself?"

"No. I came out from home with another girl. You saw her. She's been out here before, she said, and wanted a partner."

Captain Crupper reflected.

"There's a lot I don't understand. How do you happen to be doing this kind of thing at all? A girl like you?"

"I wanted to go on the stage. Father and mother wouldn't let me. So I ran away."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen almost. I'd learned dancing for years. People said I was clever. I knew I couldn't get work in London. Father and mother would find me and have me brought home again. I met the other girl in Liverpool."

"I see. And have you had enough of it?"

"It's been too awful. I can't tell you."

For some time afterwards neither spoke. Captain Crupper pondered. By taking the girl away from the dance hall he had made himself responsible for her safety. All that talk about the contract he put on one side as eye-wash. He was not afraid.

But her future! A kid girl of nineteen! Pretty and appealing and clever! What should he do with her? He wished that the chief engineer had been with him. He would have given him good advice, advice worth following.

Of one thing he was sure, the girl must go home. To stay on in Buenos Aires now was impossible.

"We're nearly there," he said.

"Where's there?" said the girl.

"The docks. I'm captain of the *Arpella*. Young Jim Ridley is our third engineer."

"Oh!" said the girl, faintly.

"He's a good lad. One of the very best."

"Yes," said the girl.

Captain Crupper leaned out of the window and told the driver to stop the taxi.

"Phyllis," he said, "are you tired?"

"Not now."

"Let's get out. We've got to think things over."

Without saying a word they walked down the Calle Cangallo towards No. 4 Dock.

Captain Crupper wondered. What ought he to do? It was late, far too late for even a man his age to be dragging a child thirty years younger than himself around the waterfront, with no settled plans in his mind how he should dispose of her.

It wasn't right. And yet who did he know in Buenos Aires who would take care of her and look after her, until he could get in touch with her people and have them send out for her? And how could he leave her? Suppose there was more in this contract business than he had thought! Suppose the management of the dance hall learned where she was and made trouble and went to law! Suppose he was arrested and put into prison!

He halted. Ahead of them was the *Rose of Aragon*.

"That's a fine ship," said the girl. "Is she yours?"

He had to smile, thinking of the *Arpella*.

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"No," he said.

"What are you going to do with me?" said the girl.

"Phyllis," he said, "I want you to promise you'll do what I say."

"I'd do anything for you."

"I'm glad. It's a tribute, you might put it, that maybe I don't deserve." He rubbed his chin. "You know, Phyllis, this isn't the time or the place to give you advice about your future, but the fact is, you're a sight too trustful!"

"I'd trust you anywhere," said the girl.

"Phyllis, you've got to go home. And as soon as possible."

"With you?"

"No."

"But why not?"

"It wouldn't be right." Captain Crupper thought of Jim Ridley and Jim Ridley's father and shook his head. "The *Arpella's* only an old tramp. We don't carry passengers, Phyllis."

"I wish you'd take me," she said.

"To be with Jim Ridley?"

"I'd feel safe with you."

This, thought Captain Crupper, was foolish.

"Phyllis," he said, "you're very fond of Jim Ridley, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the girl. "But what's the use? His father told him he wasn't to have anything to do with me. He told him he'd move heaven and earth to keep us apart."

Captain Crupper tugged at his lower lip.

"Has Jim's father ever seen you?" he asked.

"No," said the girl, "he wouldn't."

Captain Crupper began to laugh.

"Phyllis," he said, "I've got it at last. The *Rose of Aragon!*"

"I don't understand!"

"The captain of the *Rose of Aragon* is Jim Ridley's father! Phyllis, we're going on board!"

"I daren't," said the girl. "What good would it do?"

"My Heavens, girl, haven't you caught on yet? It's breaking his heart to know he's leaving you and Jim here in Buenos Aires! To keep you apart, he'll take you home! Phyllis, be nice to him, make friends with him, and before the *Rose of Aragon* reaches Southampton Water he'll be begging you not to throw Jim over! He's afraid of you, but he hasn't met you! You wait and see if I'm not right!"

And as Captain Crupper said, so it was.

Next month:

Cases From My Crime-Book

By

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

So great has been the interest taken in this remarkable series of true stories of crime from a detective's note-book, we have arranged with Mr. Ashton-Wolfe, criminologist and former pupil of M. Bertillon, to publish a further selection. The stories in this new series have been carefully chosen from among the Author's records of cases in which he personally played an active part, and each is a drama of absorbing interest.

The first story of this new series will appear next month

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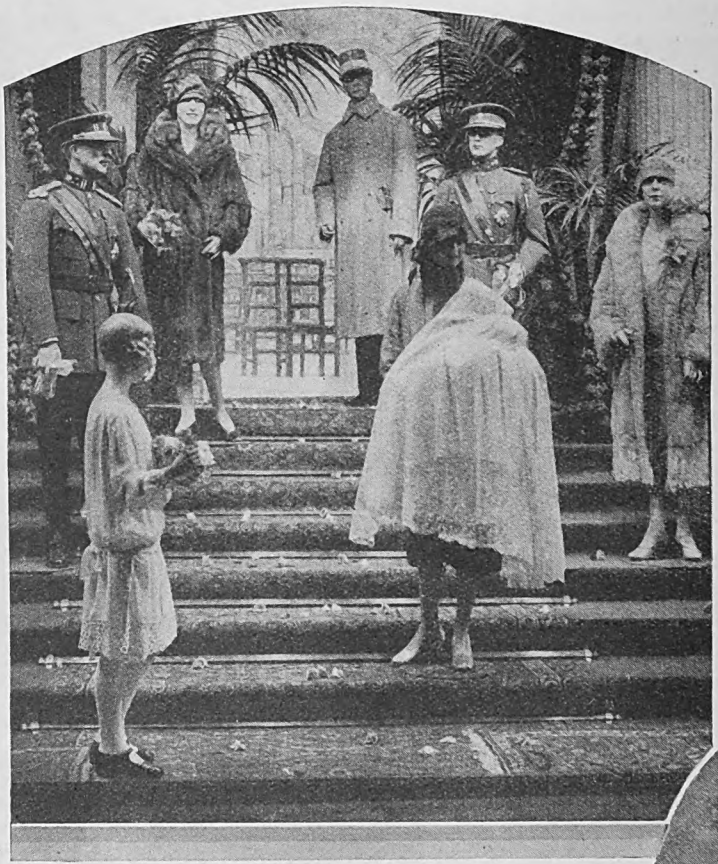

The Belgian Royal Family, modelled in wax.

MASTERPIECES IN WAX

M. Pierre Imans

THE eighteenth century saw what was almost a craze for automatons, and travellers went many miles across Europe to see Francine, the mechanical "daughter" of Descartes, the flute player of Vaucanson, the chess player of von Kempelen, and the three fascinating figures constructed by the Swiss clock-makers, Jaquet-Droz and his son, which still to this day delight visitors who see them write, draw, and play the piano at the museum of Neuchatel, in Switzerland, just as they did before the Courts of St. James and Versailles a hundred and fifty years ago.

In our more practical time the quest for a mechanical figure which shall reproduce our likeness and movements holds no interest. The only use in this commercial age for reproductions of ourselves is to give an approximate idea of what the tailor or dressmaker can do for us. If, however, we are more practical, we none the less have a

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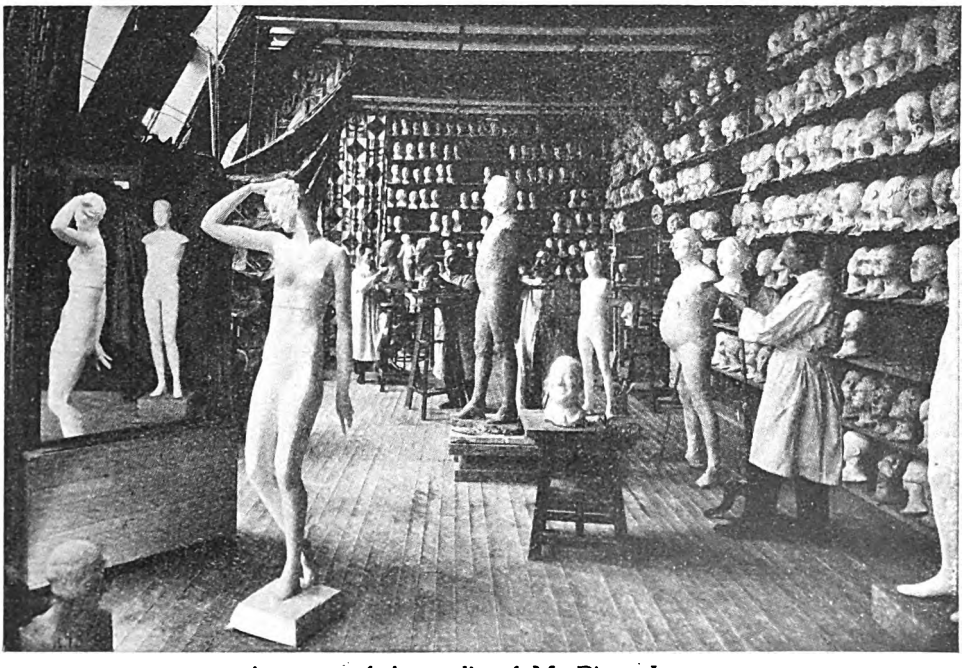
highly-developed sense of art and have grown tired of the dummies with impossible faces of sallow wax that look out of tailors' windows with stereotyped inanity and inelegance at the passers-by.

M. Pierre Imans, of Paris, staked his all on his conviction that, in spite of greater expense, much better results in sales could be obtained by the use of artistic, life-like models. He began by studying every process of the manufacture of wax. Then he got together a staff of artists and set to work. He engaged a number of handsome artists' models and mannequins, and caused life-sized statues in plaster to be made of them. From these statues moulds were made and busts cast in wax. Then came a period of experimenting in colouring. But not a single figure was allowed to get on to the market until it was completely satisfactory. To-day M. Pierre Imans is at the head of a business employing over three hundred people which is sending Parisian wax mannequins to every part of the world. He has revolutionized the industry in France, and the old-fashioned woodeny, staring model is rapidly disappearing.

M. Gaston Doumergue, President of the French Republic.
A bust in composition.

Though turned out in numbers, all models receive individual care, and it takes no less than three months to complete a figure. After the busts are turned out in the rough wax, a process of smoothing and refining begins. All mould marks are removed and the surface of the wax smoothed and prepared. Then a hole is cut in the top of the head and the bust is passed on to the next shop. Here eyes and teeth are put in, after the wax beneath the eyelids and lips has been thinned and removed. Putting eyes in straight is no easy task, for the slightest deviation is disastrous.

The beauty who now begins to see and smile gets rid of her baldness in the next department. The hair, covering a distance of an inch from the forehead, and eyebrows are put in hair by hair, and real hair is used. The workmen hold in one hand an instru-



A corner of the studio of M. Pierre Imans.

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Mlle. Suzanne Lenglen.

Miss Helen Wills.

Mayol, the popular Paris music-hall singer.

ment like a hypodermic syringe, which they stick into the head. The needle is heated, and as soon as it is withdrawn a hair is planted, the cooling wax closing round it and holding it in place. The rest of the hair is planted in small tufts of half an inch diameter. It is a work of patience and care, and the planting of the hair takes at least a day.

The pale beauty now passes into the hands of the painter, who is an artist, and under his skilful brush begins to take on lifelike tints. The artist works in oils, first colouring the face a deeper tint than it will ultimately be. By a secret process the colours sink into the wax, and the blush diffuses over the cheek with wonderful reality. But, as every artist knows, flesh tints are a combination of all colours, and when a head is completed it is a real work of art in every sense of the word.

Before the girls can pass out and be fitted to appropriate bodies they

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pass before a committee of three artists who have not been working on them! These are severe critics, and all mannequins must pass a high standard.

Real hair, eyes and teeth that look real, and the bloom of youth are not sufficient. The mannequins are still *wax* models. It is here that comes one of the most interesting of processes.

Fashion mannequins in wax.

The wax surface is made to look like human skin, even on the closest examination. This is done by means of round, short-bristle brushes. The wax is beaten with these brushes, and the bristles slightly indent the surface, giving the completest illusion of the pores of the skin, while taking off the gloss of the wax.

The busts next go to the body department, where they are

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adjusted to their foundations of the lower part of the body and shapely legs. Silk stockings and shoes are put on, and the beauty robots are ready for delivery.

M. Pierre Imans, whilst turning out these almost perfect reproductions, has kept abreast with art in its latest manifestations and has developed modern art mannequins which never fail to attract attention. These are made of a special composition and are vividly painted in natural colours or in a uniform tint.

Numbers of the models are reproductions of well-known people. The bust of Lindbergh is in great demand, and smiles at passers-by from thousands of shop windows in France. Hats perched upon his boyish head sell rapidly. M. Gaston Doumergue, President of the French Republic, in effigy is a useful aid to showing off clothes for medium stoutish men, and Suzanne Lenglen and Helen Wills display the latest in feminine tennis attire. The mannequins of Suzanne Lenglen, Helen Wills, and Lindbergh reproduced here are modern art productions in composition. Mayol, the popular Paris music-hall singer, is in wax, as are the fashion models and those of Charles Chaplin and Jackie Coogan.

Col. Charles Lindbergh.
A bust in composition.

Charles Chaplin and Jackie Coogan (wax).

All the work turned out by M. Imans's clever artists is not for commercial use. Already orders are coming in for reproductions of living people, and one famous music-hall star has placed an order for her portrait in wax. A reproduction of oneself costs from eighty to one hundred pounds. The commercial beauty robots cost twenty-five pounds for ladies, seventeen pounds for mere men, ten pounds or so for children.

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"The Shining Road"

By

JOSEPH ANTHONY

Illustrated by
S. BRIAULT

THE rain beat down in great fat globules that dropped with a crackling emphasis and made miniature waterfalls of the thin maples that lined the road.

A lone, stooped figure, squashing little waterspouts from sodden shoes and dripping playful fountains from the wreck of a felt hat, struggled stubbornly uphill through the shower. The only shelter in sight was a formidable white house. Pulling up his ineffectual coat-collar, the traveller broke into a run. At last he reached a semicircular driveway and trudged on to a row of white steps and pressed the door-bell.

A frock-coated butler, stout and insultingly comfortable, looked at the stranger with suspicion as he remarked, " Would you mind asking whether I can come in out of the rain ? "

" The master's not in," said the butler, " but if you'll wait a minute, I'll ask."

When the major-domo reappeared, it was with a slender, brown-eyed and brown-haired girl at his heels. " Why, of *course* the gentleman can come in," she said.

" I think the servants' quarters might be more suitable, miss."

" Nonsense," said the girl. " Won't you please come in ? "

The new-comer looked about in a panic of embarrassment. He was a lad of twenty-four or so, of a lithe, powerful build, made definitely handsome by his naive blue eyes, his sensitive but strong nose, and shy smile. The shabbiness of the clothes he wore was more than could be accounted for by the rain, for they had never been anything but disreputable. " I was out for a tramp when the rain started," he explained. " I'm awfully sorry to be dripping all over your carpet. I think I *had* better go round the other way."

" Not at all," said the girl. " Why, you're soaked through ! Davis will take you upstairs and put you in one of father's old suits. I'm *sure* father would want me to do that."

Davis's expression seemed to indicate an emphatic difference of opinion.

When the young man came down again, he was dressed in an ancient grey tweed several sizes too large for him.

" Won't you come in and sit by the fire ? " the girl invited him pleasantly.

" Really, this is an awful imposition on my part."

" Nonsense," she answered.

" Well, I suppose I ought to introduce myself, now that I'm here," he said. " My name's Wayne."

" And ours is Slater. My father is Roscoe J. Slater," she added, with a touch of pride.

Considering that Roscoe J. Slater was by way of being a millionaire and one of the best-known railway autocrats in the country, the young man should have been more impressed by the name than he seemed to be. He nodded slightly and drew closer to the fire.

" You must have come a long way," said Miss Slater, after a pause.

" I walked from New York."

" Twelve miles ! You *must* be a walker ! "

Mr. Wayne smiled enigmatically. " As a matter of fact, your butler's guess about me wasn't far from being right."

" You mean——"

" That I'm an ex-tramp. Now aren't you sorry you didn't have me go round the back way ? "

" But what are you *now*, Mr. Wayne ? "

" Why, I write plays and things."

Miss Slater's eyes grew wide with astonishment. " You don't mean—you're *Walter* Wayne ! " she exclaimed. " But how *wonderful !* I went to ' The Shining Road ' three times, and I thought it was the most beautiful play I ever saw."

" It's awfully nice of you to say so."

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"And did you really have experiences like the ones you wrote about? With tramps and gunmen, and—and fallen women?"

"Why, yes—though, of course, those experiences had to be toned down."

"I think it's perfectly marvellous that the storm brought you here! I've often thought that if ever I were lucky enough to meet the author of 'The Shining Road' I'd ask him whether that poor girl, Annie Casey, was taken from real life."

With incredible speed a shadow of sorrow passed over Mr. Wayne's boyish face, giving way again to resigned contemplation. "Yes, she was," he said, slowly.

"She was somebody you cared about?"

He nodded almost imperceptibly.

"And now she's dead, like in the play?"

Alas for poor Annie! The nod grew deeper, more mournful, sealing her terrible doom.

THE pause was a long one. The fire crackled and leaped high unheeded, while Miss Slater's big, sympathetic eyes looked out at the storm, filled with the sorrows of tragic dead Annie. At last Mr. Wayne spoke up. "But that," he said, "is all in the dead past."

"It can't be so *very* long ago! The papers say you are awfully young."

"What's the use of measuring time by years? It might as well be a thousand."

Miss Slater was as gentle and understanding as she was pretty. Tactfully she led away from the painful subject. "But there must have been a happy side, too?"

"There was." Mr. Wayne's peculiarly bright smile returned as he continued: "A real tramp doesn't ask for anybody's sympathy, you know, and doesn't need it. Except maybe on an evening like this. . . . Aren't you shocked to be harbouring an ex-tramp in your house?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I thought you were a tramp until you started to speak."

A draper's assistant mistaken for the Prince of Wales could have been no more deeply complimented than was the pleased and smiling Mr. Wayne. "That makes it all the sweeter of you to have been so nice to me," he said.

But Miss Slater's mind was still in the glamorous stage-world of "The Shining Road."

There were still further points to be settled in Miss Slater's mind. The hero of "The Shining Road" had committed a murder—though it was a romantic and altogether justifiable murder, to be sure. "And—did you ever *kill* a man?"

Mr. Wayne folded his arms defiantly across his chest. "Never—except in self-defence," he answered.

Dramatically there came the chug of a steaming motor outside, followed swiftly by an imperious ring and the sound of Davis's discreetly hurrying feet.

Mr. Slater entered, stout, grey-haired, pink-cheeked, and terribly competent. He filled the room with his harshly jocose voice as he demanded, "Well, Edna, what have we here?"

Miss Slater kissed him demurely. "Father, this is Mr. Wayne, who was caught in the storm," she explained. "Mr. Wayne is the playwright."

"Yes—h'm-m—quite!"

"You don't mind if Mr. Wayne wears your suit home, do you, father? He was simply drenched."

"No, no—quite all right," said Mr. Slater, a bit unconvincingly. "I'll get John to take him to the station. And could I extend a little—er—financial assistance, perhaps?"

Mr. Wayne's lips were quivering. "No, thank you," he said, very stiffly.

The door had hardly closed on the stranger when the stout Mr. Slater turned on his daughter. "Edna," he said, "if you will insist on bringing young tramps into the house and dressing them in the only comfortable clothes I have, I'll have to instruct Davis to edit that class of callers."

"But, father, he's *not* a tramp. He's Walter Wayne, the playwright!"

"Yes—h'm-m—quite!"

Roscoe J. Slater was the most surprised person in the world when the young man who had gone away with his suit of grey tweed came to return it the next day. The young man was now clad in a handsomely correct blue serge, and he arrived in a big car driven by a pug-nosed chauffeur who was as haughty as Mr. Slater's own Davis. But Edna wasn't surprised.

ONLY a little more than two years had now elapsed since young Wayne had arrived from the State of Wyoming with a suit-case full of manuscripts. As far as anybody has ever been able to discover, his first stop in town was at the office of Otto Chadwick, the theatrical manager. He marched straight to the closed door marked "Private."

Otto Chadwick was at that moment scanning with sorrow the box-office figures of a play that was gasping out its last breath at the Chadwick Theatre, and he was feeling more than usually mournful. When he looked up at last he saw Walter Wayne depositing his suit-case on the carpet. "Mr. Chadwick," he announced, "I've brought you six plays."

It was not without cause that Otto Chadwick bore the nickname of the Little

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"Won't you please come in?" said the girl.

Napoleon of Broadway. Small, plump, and scowling, he cast an inquisitive, coldly impersonal glance on the intruder.

Slowly, ever so gently, Mr. Chadwick warmed up to the attack. "Isn't that perfectly lovely? I have seven hundred and forty-one plays in the office already. That'll make an even seven hundred and forty-seven."

Wayne smiled, stooped and opened his suit-case. Click! went the latches, and one, two, three, four, five, six, the neatly typed manuscripts were deposited in an orderly pile on the desk of the Little Napoleon of Broadway.

A vast amount of nonsense has been written about the fashion in which successful authors are "discovered" by their publishers and producers. Certainly, in the case of "The Shining Road," no Balboa-like feat of exploration was required; the red-lettered title glowed cheerfully at the top of the pile, and immediately underneath Mr. Chadwick's scornfully curling nose.

Mr. Chadwick toyed negligently with the stack, preparatory to inviting its owner, as effectively and insultingly as possible, to take it home. He was rather glad to have found an object on which he could concentrate the whole force of his inexhaustible annoyance with an unappreciative world. He began, as always, mildly: "Your name is Wayne, I see. May I ask what is your profession?"

Wayne regarded Mr. Chadwick with bland surprise that such a question should be asked at all, and made reply: "Me? I'm just a tramp."

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Noblesse oblige; Otto Chadwick could no more have turned the caustic edge of his world-renowned sarcasm on this good-natured lad who acknowledged himself a tramp than the mighty Corsican could have used his big guns to shoot rabbits.

The rest is history—how Otto Chadwick, "playing a hunch," put the script of "The Shining Road" in his attaché-case that night; how he carried it back and forth between his office and his Long Island home for two weeks, and then, suddenly recalling his hunch one dull evening, began to read that wild, impossible, beautiful story; how he got his press-agent on the telephone at two in the morning, bidding him tell all the waiting world, without delay, the story of Walter Wayne, the tramp playwright!

Before the full house sign began to appear at the Chadwick Theatre, the Press of New York had taken young Wayne to its bosom. For the most part, Wayne took his honours modestly. He would blush and stammer and beg to be excused when asked to talk on the technique of the drama. But how he loved to talk of his lurid wild days in the West! He could be seen of an evening at Steve Murphy's Beefsteak House in Eighth Avenue, surrounded by tough-looking characters, newspaper men, and slumming parties, his conversation reeking of the odour of goods trucks, jails, and cheap lodging-houses. And in those days his closest crony was his pug-nosed chauffeur, Ike Garvey, who had been his pal in Wyoming, and for whose sake alone, it was said, he had the shiny, little-used car.

Occasionally, too, that great little man, Otto Chadwick, would drop in at Steve Murphy's to add a further touch of splendour to Wayne's special corner.

THEN came a time when the table was set for just two, and the tough-looking chauffeur waited outside in the big car. That was when Edna Slater arrived. Dressed in the rustling brown that went so well with her soft hair and eager eyes, excited as a schoolgirl at her first party, beautifully alive to the clatter of dishes, the rough faces, the strange personalities, she brought to Steve Murphy's place a kind of charm it had never known. All through the evening she sat with Walter Wayne and talked. And she returned the next day and the one after it. The beneficent touch of romance was in the air. The restaurateur began reserving his tables a week ahead and brought the blessings of all the saints upon the heads of Edna and Walter.

Newspaper *habitués* of Steve Murphy's were watching too. One evening *The Blade* came out with a first-page headline:—

"TRAMP PLAYWRIGHT RUMOURED ENGAGED TO EDNA SLATER.

"Wayne Seen Nightly with Society Heiress at Steve Murphy's—Refuses to Comment."

Young Wayne dined at Steve Murphy's again that night—without Miss Slater. Garvey, the pug-nosed chauffeur, was there instead. The playwright was pale and nervous.

The knowing ones were busy purveying rumours. One was loudly explaining to a party of friends. "This is the end of a bee-yoo-tiful romance, I can tell you! Edna Slater was due to come here to-night; I know that for a fact. But Pa's been readin' the papers, an' I guess he got quite a shock. Catch him letting *his* Edna marry a tramp, with or without a million dollars. . . . See that article in *The Blade*, about how Annie Casey in the play used to be his real girl?"

There was silence. Wayne sighed, looked with unhealthy disgust at the best sirloin steak to be had in New York, and called for his bill.

Wayne's chauffeur-friend took him to his little flat in Gramercy Park and quietly retreated, sadly shaking his bull-necked head. The door-bell sounded a shrill appeal. The ring grew imperious, hot-tempered. Angrily Wayne went to the door. There stood Otto Chadwick.

"Walter," the visitor demanded, "is that snobbish ass of a father of hers interfering?"

Walter nodded.

"Well, you're not going to take *him* seriously, are you?"

"He's put a private detective on my trail. The man is on his way to Wyoming now."

"But, good heavens, what of it? *You've* never concealed anything about your past, have you—anything they could—er—put you in jail for?"

Walter offered no reply.

The producer whistled softly and lost himself in puzzled meditation. Then he spoke again, gently. "Walter, don't let him scare you! And don't forget, whatever happens, that I'll back you up!"

In spite of which assurance, Walter had disappeared off the face of the earth by the next morning. He was gone, bag and baggage and chauffeur.

AND there matters rested until the Broadway offices of Otto Chadwick were invaded by Roscoe J. Slater a week later. Strangely, the burly master of railways had lost his manner of authority; he held his hat in his hand with unbe-

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coming meekness as he spoke to the girl at the front desk. Nor did he complain when he was kept waiting an inordinately long time.

Admitted to Chadwick's room at last. Slater sat down without being invited, cleared his throat, and spoke up nervously. "Mr. Chadwick, I've called to see you about young Wayne."

Chadwick, as he looked up with ever so slight an inclination of his head, inquired in accents of barbed sweetness: "And what is it that you would like of Mr. Wayne? You've chased him out of town. Now would you like to have me shoot him and stuff him for a trophy for your hunting-room?"

It was a source of amazement and no little pride to Mr. Chadwick that his visitor offered no resistance to this broadside attack. His hand dropped limply to his knee; he swallowed and wriggled uneasily in his chair. At last he replied hoarsely: "I don't blame you for being angry, Mr. Chadwick. I'm afraid I've done a great injustice."

"Indeed? What convinced you of your mistake?"

Mr. Slater shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of helplessness and handed Chadwick a crumpled yellow sheet. "Here's a telegram I've just had from Ginter, my detective," he said.

"*Sadler's Gulch, Wyoming.*

"*Must be some mistake. Wayne belongs to old respected family here. Became teacher in local school on death of father, who was cattle dealer. Has supported widowed mother handsomely. Taught school until he came to New York, which makes tramp and Annie Casey stories impossible. Is idolized in this town. Wayne's chauffeur, who was caretaker of school house, rumoured seen here recently. Await further instructions.*

"GINTER."

It was not without some profit that Chadwick had spent thirty of his fifty-odd years in playing poker and producing plays. There was not a ruffle in his serenity to betray that the telegram had been quite as startling to him as to the despondent Mr. Slater. "And what did you think the lad *was*? A felon?" he demanded.

"But I don't understand! With my own ears I heard him confess that he had been a tramp, a thief, and a murderer."

"Mr. Slater! In the first place, you're an ass. In the second place, you're an egregious ass. In the third place, I could have enlightened you about Wayne if you'd come to me before the damage was done. Being an artist, he has the artistic temperament, and that's all there is to *that*. If a man writes a play about tramp life, he believes he has been a tramp—and to all intents and purposes he *has*."

Mr. Slater was beginning to bear a marked resemblance to a chained elephant goaded by a mouse. "It's beyond me," he said, helplessly. "But I'll take your word for it. All I want to do now is to find the boy."

"And why?"

The chair creaked as Slater suddenly straightened his ponderous body and surveyed Chadwick grimly, with a return of his old fighting spirit. "Not because of anything *you* have to say, my dear Mr. Chadwick," he said. "It's because"—he dropped his hand to his knee again, and the flare-up was over already—"my daughter won't speak to me. She swears I have done something terrible to him—had him kidnapped or murdered. I'm at my wits' end. I can't eat, sleep, or work. Nobody knows what I've been through."

"Why don't you get your detective to find him?"

"I tried to get him on the long-distance telephone last night. The people at the hotel told me he'd disappeared."

Chadwick whistled softly. "This grows more and more interesting," he remarked. "I *would* be worried, if I were in your shoes!"

And now Otto Chadwick arose to his full height of sixty-one inches. His plump chest was inflated; his eyes burned with a transcendental fire. "Mr. Slater," he commanded, crisply, "stop your worrying!"

"How can I?"

"Because *I'm* going to adjust this little matter!" was the answering pronouncement of Otto Chadwick. He pressed a buzzer, and straightway a typist came. "I want a ticket to Sadler's Gulch, Wyoming, on the first train leaving to-morrow," he said. A far-away look came over his bland and seamless face. Anybody who had ever worked with Otto Chadwick could have known that he had another of his famous hunches.

THE town of Sadler's Gulch, Wyoming, as Chadwick alighted from the train, reminded him of nothing so much as the back streets of St. George, Staten Island, on a sunny day. There was nothing of the Wild West about the little street that led down to the station.

Sadler's Gulch boasted of a hotel called the Travellers' Rest, a two-storey building on the classic lines of an egg-crate. Mr. Chadwick had outfitted himself with baggy knickers, purple and green golf-stockings, and the broadest-brimmed Stetson hat to be bought in New York, and was somewhat taken aback to find that the loungers in the Travellers' Rest were more

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conservatively dressed. He signed the register that was pushed to him by the languid proprietor, and inquired :—

"Is Walter Wayne's home near here ?"

The man at the desk, who had seemed only bored up to now, began to look distinctly hostile. "Why do you want to know, stranger ? Who are you ?" he demanded.

Mr. Chadwick produced one of his neatly-engraved cards. "Why, I'm the producer of Walter's plays," he replied, "and——"

There was no need to say more. The hotel man was crying, ecstatically : "Shake ! I reckon any friend of Walter's is welcome here. I'm sorry if I seemed unfriendly-like, Mr. Chadwick. You see, there was another man from New York here a few days ago—a fellow named Ginter—inquiring about Walter. He spent a couple of days here, sort of sneaking around, and then just evaporated, leaving a busted old suit-case and some dirty clothes."

Chadwick concluded that it would be just as well for the present to postpone his inquiries about the detective. "I had to come West on business," he explained, "and I thought it would be nice to see Walter's home town. And I want to look up his mother."

"Well, any time you're ready to, you let me know and I'll take you there myself. Roper's my name," said the host. He fingered the card and read aloud, reverently : "Otto Chadwick. Chadwick's Theatre." Then, stepping out to take charge of the New Yorker's baggage, which before he had pointedly ignored, he announced to the company at large, "Fellows, this is the man that puts on Walter's plays in the theayter on Broadway, New York."

Chadwick, who had come questing for information, found himself giving it. They wanted to know whether it was true that Walter now lived in grand style in the city ; and whether he had actually employed that pug-nosed good-for-nothing Ike Garvey, who used to be caretaker of the schoolhouse, as his private chauffeur. Chadwick answered their questions expansively, distributing luxurious Havana Perfectos along with the information ; and fifteen minutes after his arrival in Sadler's Gulch he rejoiced in the knowledge that he was an exceedingly popular member of that community.

"There's just one thing I can't understand," said the proprietor ; "I've been getting some of these New York papers to read up about Walter, and they all call him the tramp playwright. Where do they get that kind of talk ? Walter never did anything in his life before he went to New York but go to school and then teach school."

"Well, you know what the newspapers are," Chadwick explained. "They have to fill up their space somehow."

"Well, seems to me they could fill it up some way without telling a pack of lies about Walter. Shall I take you right over to Mrs. Wayne's ? I guess she'll be mighty glad to see you."

MR. ROPER conjured up an antique Ford and departed with Chadwick, carrying him off a mile or so down the winding road to where an intimate cluster of cottages nestled in the pine-sheltered valley. Here he banged lustily at the door of one of the modest little houses, and presently was introducing Chadwick to Mrs. Wayne, a gentle, middle-aged lady who had Walter's blue eyes and his smile. And now the hotel man considerately departed, waving his hand airily and rattling away again.

Mrs. Wayne, eyeing her visitor timidly, seemed to be reassured by his not too formidable size. She ushered him into the living-room. "And are you *really* the producer of Walter's plays ?" she inquired, with a profundity of respect that was all that the heart of the Little Napoleon of Broadway could desire.

"Why, of course. Hasn't Walter written you about me ?"

"Many times, and he described you exactly as you are. Walter always did write so beautifully !" Again she looked at him with that strangely shy expression of hers, like a sparrow questioning how close she dared come to an apparently friendly hand. "Mr. Chadwick," she continued, "has Walter made *all* that money of his—the thousands and thousands of dollars he's sent me—just by writing plays ?"

"I should say he has, and a good deal more. You'll be having a millionaire for a son one of these days. But surely he's *told* you all that !"

"I know it's perfectly awful of me to ask such questions," Mrs. Wayne answered, "but —Mr. Chadwick, things have been so strange ! There was a man here a few days ago who asked nasty, prying things about Walter, and the newspapers have printed such queer things about him, and —Mr. Chadwick, *you're* a friend of Walter's ! *Please*, if you're concealing anything from me——"

Very gallantly Otto Chadwick captured one of her frail hands and held it. "Mrs. Wayne, I'm certainly *not* going to conceal anything from you," he said.

Rapturously, as though he were outlining the plot of a new play, Chadwick told her, from the very beginning, the tale of Walter and his plays ; of that historic speech, "Me —I'm just a tramp" ; of gentle Edna Slater

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"Fellows," he announced to the company, "this is the man that puts on Walter's plays in the theayter on Broadway, New York."

and ungentle Roscoe J. As Mrs. Wayne listened intently, her wide-eyed wonder gave way to a smile of exceeding contentment. "Mr. Chadwick," she said at last, "I think I'd better tell you what *I* know! If you start out tomorrow morning on the road to Piny Knob, and turn off on a side-trail to the right, about four miles out, and then keep going about two miles farther, you'll find an old wooden shanty with a tin roof, and Walter inside it, with Ike Garvey. That boy had me frightened within an inch of my life! He came to me in the middle

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of the night, all worn and pale, and told me he would have to hide—from what, he wouldn't say. And when that Ginter man came prying, I can tell you I was scared! You *swear* you have told me everything?"

"I do—and I swear that I am yours to command," added Otto Chadwick, as he arose and bowed grandiloquently and shivering noises outside announced that Mr. Roper's chariot had returned.

THE dawn hadn't been tarrying long on the white-capped crests of Piny Knob when Otto Chadwick arose in his room at the Travellers' Rest, donned his knicker-bockers and his gaudy hose, tucked his capacious felt hat under his arm, and went downstairs to do justice to breakfast. Psychological battles are not fought on an empty stomach any more than those of grim physical warfare.

And now, full of sound victuals, Mr. Chadwick made known his desire for a horse. The host of the Travellers' Rest surveyed him admiringly. "You sure don't believe in wastin' time, mister!" he remarked.

A few minutes later the stout little denizen of Broadway was bobbing up and down unconcernedly on the back of a steady black mare. First he followed the road that dipped deeper into the valley; then, as Mrs. Wayne had directed, he took the slow uphill path that led in serpentine green-bordered curls toward the upper reaches of Piny Knob. The horse, thoroughly at home on the trail, plodded ahead at a comfortable gait. Mr. Chadwick looked round to make sure that he was not observed, and his right hand slipped unobtrusively into his hip pocket. The mare jogged ahead, carrying him onward and upward.

Coming at length to the crest where Mrs. Wayne had bidden him turn, Chadwick urged his steed to the right, cutting abruptly off the sunny highway into a tortuous narrow path that twisted its uncertain way through the gloom to tall pines. Some miles farther on the path opened up again, revealing a terrifying bold cliff to the right, a clearing, and a fresh trail the other way. Midway between stood a dilapidated shanty of unpainted boards patched with rusty tin. Mr. Chadwick watched it triumphantly and dismounted. Now he tied his horse to a tree in the thicket and proceeded up the blind alley on foot. Cautiously he cut a semicircular path through the trees and approached the shack from the rear. A low window faced him, shoulder-high. He came close with silent tread, found a clear patch on its dirt-encrusted surface, and put his eye to it. He was able to make out three blurry forms. One of them, sure enough, was Walter; the other he guessed by its great girth and broad shoulders to be Ike Garvey, the chauffeur; but the third——

Chadwick listened intently but could hear nothing. Walter was in one corner of the room, seated. Garvey towered above him, standing; while the third man, in a chair facing Walter, seemed unnaturally huddled. After a long while Garvey moved. Involuntarily Chadwick ducked his head; he had caught the flash of a revolver-butt, gleaming in an unbuttoned holster at the chauffeur's side.

Chadwick took another turn at his spying. He waited an intolerably long while for someone to speak. When he did catch the low buzz of a man's voice at last, he could tell only that it was the third man who had spoken, for the words were indistinguishable.

Walter arose now and paced the room nervously. Again Chadwick found it advisable to duck his head, as Walter came striding directly at him. But now Walter spoke up, loudly and clearly enough: "There's no need for you to be scared, Ginter—unless you try to get away. If you *want* to know what I'm going to do with you, I'll tell you. I'm going to keep you right here in this shack long enough to teach you that this town is no place for spies. And when I let you go, you can tell your boss anything you feel like."

At last Ginter's despairing protest was audible: "But I tell you Mr. Slater has my report already! There was nothing bad about you in it. What's the sense——"

"Shut up!" Walter raged, in a voice that overflowed the room. Ginter seemed to slump back still farther in his chair.

The spy at the window, far from being horrified at what he saw, was smiling altogether contentedly. Ever so carefully, watching every inch of the ground lest he give the alarm with a single noisy step, he backed away and retraced his curving path through the clump of trees to the trail. Then he mounted his black mare again, slapped lustily at her flanks, and came up the path again by the direct route, and with no attempt at silence. In fact, he let out a lusty halloo: "Hi there, Walter!"

The door was open in a jiffy, Walter's set face peering out of it. It was slammed again abruptly, and Walter came to meet his visitor half-way, as Chadwick dismounted. A changed Walter he was, dressed in khaki shirt and riding-breeches, with a business-like revolver-holster strapped to his belt; but changed in more ways than the matter of costume. His face was pale and drawn; his mouth was unnaturally tightened; his half-closed eyes, which seemed to be trying

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unsuccessfully to avoid Chadwick's, were those of a man in torture.

"Hello, Walter," Chadwick said. "I guess you didn't expect to find *me* in these parts, did you?"

Of the two, Chadwick was by far the better conspirator. Walter kicked his heels nervously into the dirt of the road, every movement of his eyes and hands and feet betraying a sense of guilt. "I—I didn't, Chadwick," he answered, slowly. "I—I'm sorry I can't ask you into the shack. You see—well—my friend Garvey is in there, and he's sick."

"Why, certainly, that's quite all right, Walter. I just rode out from the hotel to say hello."

Walter towered over him, folding and unfolding his arms in an agony of nervousness. "How on earth did you find out where I was?" he asked.

"From your mother. You needn't worry about that if you want to be alone, Walter. She hasn't told anybody else."

"I *do* want to be alone," said Walter. "That's why I came here."

"And *I* came here, Walter, to tell you that that's a lot of nonsense. I want to know when you're coming back to New York with me."

"Never. From now on I'm going to keep just as many thousands of miles between myself and New York as possible."

"And how about a certain young lady who'll be wanting to hear from you?"

"Please, Otto, I don't want to seem rude, but—please don't mention that subject, ever. I'm never going to see Edna again."

"That sounds like a—well, sort of unnecessary decision to me."

Walter faced the producer with his burning, unhappy eyes. "It's no use, Chadwick," he said. "I may as well tell you the truth; you'll find it out for yourself soon enough. I've been a liar and a fraud. I was never a tramp in my life. All those exciting adventures I used to tell were lies. I don't know why I did it. Maybe it was living in a place that romantic stories were told about, and never doing anything more romantic myself than teaching school. Oh, what's the use of trying to find excuses, anyway? I told lies to Edna—dozens of them—every time I ever saw her—and I just can't face her again."

"And suppose I were to tell you that all this terrible confession of yours wouldn't make the slightest difference to Edna?"

"It's no use. It's not a case of my being stubborn. I tell you I *couldn't* face her again! Can't you see that?"

"And suppose I tell you——"

"Otto, I—I appreciate your kindness, and all that, but—I'd rather you didn't say any more. I suppose now I'm ungrateful as well as a liar. I can't help it."

"Then it's good-bye, Walter?"

"Good-bye; you—you won't betray me, now?"

"No, I won't betray you, Walter."

CHADWICK, riding slowly down the trail, was aware, without looking back, that Walter was watching him intently from the cabin door. He sat erect on his horse and waved a last casual farewell. What Walter couldn't see, with only a back presented to him, was the broad smile that was gathering on Otto Chadwick's face. Mr. Chadwick was putting his own interpretation on the promise not to betray.

Once he was safely lost in the first bend of the trail, Chadwick jogged the black mare recklessly with his heels, stimulating her to an uncomfortable trot. Until he had come to the broadening of the path where it met the main trail, he looked neither to right nor to left; but the smiles on his face seemed to have become a permanent fixture.

By the time he had reached the valley and the broad open road, Chadwick had the black mare performing at her best. Magnificently she came tearing along the home stretch, bringing interested householders and shopkeepers to their doors.

Leaving his sweating steed at the hitching-post, Chadwick almost ran head-on into his languid host, who had been watching him in silent amusement. "What's the hurry, mister?" the hotel man inquired.

Chadwick's answering voice, charged with electric excitement, rang out like the clang of a fire-alarm: "Call the sheriff! Wayne has kidnapped that man Ginter! He and Garvey are holding him a prisoner in the cabin at Piny Knob!"

"The hell you say! I thought Walter was in New York!"

"Call the sheriff!" Chadwick clamoured again.

The hotel man fastened a long keen look upon Chadwick as upon some peculiarly loathsome specimen of vermin. Without a word, he jumped to the back of the tired horse and clattered away. Once more Chadwick found himself the centre of an interested group at the hotel, but this time he was not quite so popular. In fact, he caught the tail end of one remark, which contained among other things the phrase "interfering spy."

To Chadwick's great relief, the hotel man didn't tarry long; when he returned he was mounted on a fresh horse, with two more lean and rangy horsemen beside him. They got his story; at any rate, as much of it as the producer cared to tell. When it was

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finished, the host of the Travellers' Rest remarked, dryly: "I don't know what Walter's been doing—we're going to see. But I'd advise you to make yourself scarce, stranger, before we get back. Walter's kind of popular around here."

Chadwick looked away, lest they observe his smile, and did not turn back until twelve hoofs had gone thundering down the road. Then he put his hands in his pockets nonchalantly, and sauntered away—by another street—toward the cottage of Mrs. Wayne.

It proved a strenuous morning for Chadwick, for Walter's mother found it exceedingly hard to understand some of the things he had to say this time. All the same, when he left her to attend to further business, there was a smile on her face; a gentle, rueful, puzzled sort of smile.

The ramifications of Mr. Otto Chadwick's strategic actions were far-reaching that sunshiny day. In Sadler's Gulch Walter Wayne and his comrade, Ike Garvey, came riding down the main street in disgrace, with their erstwhile prisoner beside them and three grim-looking men on foot leading their horses. Straight to the town lock-up went the melancholy procession. Elsewhere, transcontinental wires were already beginning to buzz. In New York, *The Blade* came out that evening with a streamer headline clear across its front page:—

"WALTER WAYNE TURNS DESPERADO.
KIDNAPS DETECTIVE."

Further down, across three columns to the right, was the startling sub-head:—

"Capturing Sleuth, Tramp Playwright
Is Himself Caught by Western Sheriff.
Jailed in Home Town."

But there was still another, and more important, message on the whispering wires. It was from the theatrical man to Edna Slater:—

"*Walter needs you. Come at once.*
"OTTO CHADWICK."

The telegraph operator, taking the message from the man responsible for Walter's arrest, was puzzled. Ginter, the detective, inclined to take a lenient view of things, but, spurred on by Chadwick to press his complaint, was still more puzzled. Possibly the hotel man was puzzled most of all, learning that Chadwick, expelled from his house, had been taken in by Walter's mother. Walter, languishing in jail, seemed to have no views on anything at all. Held without bail through the machinations of the wicked Chadwick, he stared long and hard at the floor of his cell and talked to no one.

Five days later the town of Sadler's Gulch received a new thrill when Roscoe J. Slater and his daughter Edna stepped off the evening train. Mrs. Wayne and the unpopular Mr. Chadwick met them at the station, where the two men promptly became involved in a violent argument. Then the party proceeded to the lock-up. All but Edna waited in the outer corridor.

A key clicked in the lock of Walter's cell. Walter, dazed as a prisoner being led out of the Siberian mines after twenty years of confinement, was helped by the friendly arm of the sheriff into his private room. Here he looked around blankly, dejectedly preparing to resist still another inquisition. The official stepped outside and left him alone with Miss Slater.

Outside, there was a long period of waiting, which was made less tiresome than it might otherwise have been by a vigorous resumption of the words between Mr. Chadwick and Mr. Slater. "I'll give you all the credit you want for everything else you've done," Mr. Slater was saying, "but I can't see why you had to put the poor boy in jail!"

Whereupon Mr. Chadwick called Mr. Slater an ass; and it seemed that Mr. Slater very much resented being called an ass.

IN the sheriff's office things were moving along in a considerably smoother fashion. Edna's vivacious brown eyes were close to the prisoner's serious blue ones, and the two were conversing in the faintest of whispers. At intervals they seemed to grow weary of talking, but, illogically, their lips would come closer together.

The sheriff reappeared, rattling his keys loudly to herald his approach. "Well, Walter," he said, "I'm not trying to hurry you, but this ain't your home any more. *But*"—he snapped out the word curtly—"I want you to promise to cut out this rough stuff, and behave yourself."

Thoughtfully Walter watched the sheriff's stern face. Then he flashed his rueful boyish smile. "Quit your kidding, sheriff," he replied. "I'm through with that stuff for good—that is, unless somebody starts calling me the tramp playwright again."

"Well, let's go!" said the energetic Mr. Chadwick.

"Yes — h'm - m — quite!" replied Mr. Slater.

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BOB MENZIES GIVES ALMS

By

Lynn Doyle

Illustrated by
JOHN CAMPBELL

1.

LITTLE Robert Menzies and his uncle Hugh sat in the kitchen of Hugh Menzies's farmhouse, one on each side of the hearth. It was about nine o'clock on an October evening, and quite dark outside, but there was no other light in the kitchen than the glow of the red coals. Now and then a spurt of flame would cast a dancing gleam on the walls and light up the two faces. The boy's face was pale, with large, dreamy blue eyes; a sober face, lit up now and then with a slow but singularly pleasant smile. The psychologist would have deduced a dreamer and idealist, with a hint of humour, latent but undeveloped.

No trace of humour showed in the face of his uncle, a man of about fifty. The firelight disclosed a simple serious character, with a trace of wistfulness, imprinted by life. The tall, stooping frame and long face and sparse, pointed beard suggested something of Don Quixote.

Since the death of Bob's father, two years before, when Bob was almost ten, the pair had lived alone together, except for a housekeeper. It was their practice every winter night after the housekeeper had gone to bed to sit by the fire and talk. Hugh Menzies was a diffident man; and felt more at ease with Bob than with his grown-up neighbours.

The silence that had fallen between the two was broken by the uncle.

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" Bob," he said, " here's a piece of advice for you : Be hard. That's the only way to get on in the world ; and I've proved it."

The boy looked at his uncle, and laughed softly.

" I don't think you're very hard, uncle," he said.

Mr. Menzies compressed his lips slowly.

" Am I not ? " he said. " Am I not ? Don't get that notion into your head ; for it's a foolish notion. Maybe I was a bit soft in my young days ; but I don't want you to follow my example. I suffered for it, Bob ; and so would you. There's a soft drop in you, too. Get rid of it, or you'll never do a day's good in this world. People will find it out. They found it out in me, and played on me. Many a pound it has cost me. But latterly I've changed my tune." He paused, and looked at the boy intently. " Bob," he said, " I'm going to put Mrs. Flanagan out of her cottage."

The boy stared at him. His mouth half-opened in his astonishment and dismay.

" Oh, uncle ! " he breathed.

" Yes," said Mr. Menzies, violently, " she's going out this time. Why should I let that slippery old faggot humbug me any longer ? The cottage costs me two or three pounds a year for thatch and repairs ; I let her have it for sixpence a week, and she's ten shillings in arrear even of that. I need the cottage, too. I'm paying my ploughman two pounds a year extra because I have no cottage for him ; and why should I let old Sally Flanagan sit in it rent free ? Besides, it's a pure case of imposition. She has the money and could pay me to-morrow if she liked."

" Do you really think she could ? " faltered the boy. " I'm afraid she's very poor, uncle."

" Now, Robert," said his uncle, shaking a finger at him, " this is just a case in point. This is where a young, inexperienced fellow like you gets taken in. The world is full of impostors and rogues ; and the sooner we find that out the better for us. Away to your bed now, and think over what I've been telling you. I've had a long experience of the world, Bob, remember that ; and if I don't know what's what by this time it's a queer thing. Good night, son." He stroked the boy's hair affectionately. " God bless you."

Little Bob Menzies climbed slowly up to his attic, and began to undress. First he kicked off his boots. Then he stripped off his stockings, which lay where they fell. Next he took out of his jacket pockets three round pebbles and two pieces of flint. These he arranged in a row on his wash-stand, alternating the pebbles and the flints ; and after contemplating the result with much satisfaction he knelt by the bedside and said his prayers. Then he finished his undressing hastily. His jacket and waistcoat he hung on the end of the bed ; but his knicker-bockers joined his stockings on the floor. Then he turned down the bedclothes, and, raising the candle, looked cautiously round the room. Gazing intently at one of the window-curtains, he perceived that its folds had assumed the form of a man's savage face. He straightened the curtain, and, blowing out the candle, leaped into bed and drew the bed-clothes partly over his face, at the same time closing his eyes tightly.

BUT it was long before he went to sleep. The thought of poor Sally Flanagan and her approaching calamity haunted him more and more insistently. Her meagre bent figure, her sunken cheeks and nut-cracker nose and chin rose before him. He heard her plaintive voice, her complaining whine that " the world was a very hard place for the poor." He knew his uncle was not a hard man, was even by some persons regarded as a simpleton. In his childish acceptance of things as they were he was satisfied that Sally must either pay her rent or be evicted. The claim of William Wilson, the ploughman, to the cottage was unquestionable. As matters stood William had to walk three-quarters of a mile to his work. Besides, he liked William, and would be glad to have him living so near the farm-house. Plainly the eviction of Sally Flanagan was a just and even a desirable thing. Yet it was hard that she must go to the workhouse because she had not ten shillings. She had lived in the cottage thirty years, twenty with her husband and her son, and ten a lonely widow abandoned by her ungrateful child. Perhaps it was necessary to be hard. But the necessity was going to make life an unpleasant business for a certain small boy. Bother ! Sally Flanagan's affairs were none of his business. He buried himself deeper in the bedclothes. He would go to sleep.

But Bob Menzies could not go to sleep, on account of a very unpleasant fact that had all along been in the background of his consciousness, and now had come resolutely forward and driven out all other considerations bearing on the sad case of Mrs. Flanagan. There was a certain boy who had thirteen shillings in his money-box, and he, Bob Menzies, was that boy. Clearly it was his duty to arise in the morning and bestow ten shillings out of that hoard on Sally Flanagan. All the boys of whom he had read—the good boys, that was—would have done so. He himself had in his day-dreams given away pounds in even less deserving cases than Sally's, and had been rewarded a hundredfold. Ah, there was the rub.

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His ten shillings were real, solid silver shillings, more than a third of the price of that real shot-gun for which he yearned more than for anything else in the world; and his reward would be only day-dream gold. Even in the exceptional generosity of his uncle it would take him years to restore ten shillings. Perhaps he would be gone off to business, and a gun be useless to him. Better face the truth: he would never have a gun of his own if he gave the ten shillings to Sally Flanagan. That settled it. He had forgotten his uncle's advice. His uncle was quite right. It was necessary to be hard in this world.

But he had thirteen shillings; and with ten of those shillings he could save Sally Flanagan from the workhouse, preserve for her the poor little home, sole relic of her happiness. Oh, it was a shame, it was a *shame* that this trial should have been ordained for him.

Nevertheless, the struggle was over. His ten shillings were already dedicated to the service of Sally. His uncle might preach hardness, his boyish soul might yearn over his relinquished gun; but he knew it was impossible for him to let Sally be thrust out in the roadside while his money-box was full.

Presently compensation for his self-denial began to come to him. He thought with satisfaction of Sally's change from sorrow to relief and delight, of her protestations of gratitude, her tears and blessings. Then he remembered that this attitude of mind was sinful, and would diminish, if not cancel, his heavenly reward. There should be no self-seeking, no carnal pride about his gift, or the sacrifice would not be acceptable. He crept out of bed, and in simple fervour, but with a rotundity of phrase that was not his own, besought that the blessing of God would make fruitful his bounty to one of the poorest of His creatures, then crept reverently to bed, and in a few moments was fast asleep.

II.

IN the morning the fit of exaltation was still upon him. He felt strangely light-hearted as he moved about the room. He saw that only virtue made for happiness; and planned out a long life devoted to benevolence. Spiritual pride returned to him; but in the daylight he did not recognize it, and complacently saw himself set apart from the way of the sinful. That his life might be all of one piece he washed himself with unusual care, and descended to breakfast longing for the moment of immolation.

During the meal he observed that his uncle was ill at ease and ate in silence, contrary to his wont. Bob felt sorry for him. He knew Mr. Menzies must be suffering the pangs of conscience for the action he was meditating, and could not help contrasting their respective positions to his own advantage.

"Time you were off to school, Bob," said his uncle at last, gloomily. "Speak to Mrs. Ross as you go through the yard, and tell her I want her to take a letter to Sally Flanagan."

Mrs. Ross, a brisk, sturdy little woman of thirty-five or so, sniffed incredulously when she heard the message.

"Aye, another journey for nothin'," she said, carefully cleaning the last fragment of hens' food off the wooden spoon in her hand, and throwing the morsels on the backs of the unheeding crowd of gobblers. "About once a month I'm sent to give notice to that slippery old faggot; an' then the master goes down the next day an' countermands it. If he hadn't some sensible body behind his hand, God knows what would become of the soft old fool. Away with you now, Bob; I didn't mean all that. But he is, all the same," she said, testily, as she turned away, "an' ould soft-hearted fool."

For the first half-mile of his journey to school Bob was filled with dismay by these words of Mrs. Ross. He perceived that his struggle and his victory were likely to be in vain. His crown of sacrifice was in danger of being withheld from him after all. Money became as dross to him compared with the spiritual triumph to which he had braced himself, and a gun vanity. Then, as he entered on the short-cut across the Quaggy Bogs, a pair of wild-duck clattered up out of a drain about thirty yards away, and he saw that a small boy possessed of a gun would enjoy many compensations. He had now, too, entered on the Apache-haunted prairie; and a wary scout had no time to be thinking about Sally Flanagan and her troubles. But as he drew near home in the afternoon, tired and hungry, thoughts of her returned throngingly. He could not make up his mind whether to wish that his uncle had been firm or had relaxed. In either case it was better to end the uncertainty. He began to walk quickly. When he entered the kitchen his uncle was sitting there.

"Did you give Sally notice, uncle?" he asked, breathlessly.

"I did, Robert," replied his uncle, with firmness. "When I make up my mind to do a thing I do it."

Mr. Menzies's answer might have been decisive to Bob if he had not heard from the scullery the voice of Mrs. Ross pronouncing cautiously but heartily the response: "Aye, God knows!" Experience told him that

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Mrs. Ross sniffed incredulously when she heard the message.

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the words were to be taken as ironical, and he wavered.

"And *do* you mean to put her out, uncle?" he asked, timidly.

"If she doesn't pay me ten shillings before dinner-time to-morrow, I'm off to Johnson, the solicitor," his uncle answered; and Bob knew from the raised tone that his uncle also had heard Mrs. Ross's voice, and had uttered a challenge, and was irrevocably committed to severity against Mrs. Flanagan. At once it became blindingly clear to him that his deed of sacrifice was not to be performed merely in imagination, that he must in actual fact part with his money beyond recall. He sat a little while in stunned silence, and through his brain ran a mingled thought of the desirability of a gun and the Sisyphus labour of saving a fresh ten shillings.

YET he did not falter in his purpose. Some hidden force impelled him. Whence it came he knew not; but the unerring instinct of the Puritan warned him that it was a spirit of carnality, that the high essence of selfless benevolence was not for him. He perceived that he had been planning to wear the crown without bearing the cross, that he had never really believed he should have to give his money to Sally Flanagan, but had all along felt that his uncle would relent. In an impulse compounded partly of a desire for self-maceration, partly of a feeling that, after all, he might as well take a sporting long-shot for grace, he picked out the newest and brightest of his ten shillings; but in his heart he knew that his reward must come at the hands of Sally Flanagan only.

An errand sought from his uncle furnished him with an excuse for passing near the cottage. When he came in sight of the lighted window his heart failed him a little, and he slackened his step. Full realization of her calamity must by this time have come to old Sally. Before she could learn of his errand of mercy there would be a period during which she must look on him with hostility as the nephew of her oppressor, a spy sent to gloat over her anger or her grief. Bob shrank from the ordeal. Timidly he raised the latch and, opening the door, stood on the threshold. The old woman looked up from the fire of sticks beside which she had been crouching, and peered sharply at him.

Her thin shoulders were stooped, the face was parchment yellow, and the matted hair was grey almost to whiteness. But the eyes were still bright and the glance keen. To Bob's tender conscience they spoke accusation and reproach. He did not dare to venture into the kitchen, but stood irresolute on the threshold.

The expression of Sally's face softened. When she spoke it was in the complaining whine punctuated by short breathless groans that Bob knew and dreaded.

"Auch—Master Bob—it is you, dear—auch—these pains, these pains. Come in, dear; come in an' sit down. Take the good chair; that oul' stool is no seat for a young gentleman like you. Auch—I'm very bad to-night, Master Bob; I think it's the change in the moon. An' I run myself off my feet after that woman's goat next door. She was in among my wee bits of winter cabbages. Aw, put there, my dear, put there on purpose. It's not the first time—auch——"

"Did she do much harm, Sally?" asked the boy, staving off the evil hour.

"No, dear, no. I heard her in time," answered Sally, rising painfully to her feet with the help of a withered branch of firewood, and seating herself on a stool. "I heard her in time, Master Bob, an' run out an' caught her in the act—an' hit her a skelp or two with my stick that her hind-end won't forget till this time to-morrow."

Sally chuckled at the remembrance, then recollected herself, and fell back into her complaining tone.

"Auch—it's a sore thing—a sore thing to be old an' poor, an' put-upon. Auch—Your uncle did a cruel turn on me this day, Master Bob," turning suddenly on him ("*Now* it's coming," thought the boy, miserably)—"a cruel turn on a poor old woman with one foot in the grave. An' him with plenty of the best. He had little call, for the sake of two or three miserable shillings, to threaten the poor an' the needy an' the afflicted. Oh, Master Bob, dear!" And Sally raised her voice in weeping.

"I'll do it now," said Bob to himself, and laid hold of his money. But Sally did not give him time to speak.

"Not that I blame him," she said, blowing her nose fiercely. "He may be a bit hasty at times, but he's kindly in the end. It was that woman Ross put him up to it. From the day she first put her foot in his house she was again me, an' Judased me, an' undermined me. She came down herself, Master Bob, this mornin', to give me the notice, an' tri*umph* over poor old Sally. 'Get out,' sez she; 'get out, ye ould witch, ye.' As true as God's in heaven them was the very words she used. 'Ye've been here too long,' sez she. 'I've been here longer nor you,' sez I, back to her, like that, 'an' longer nor you'll ever be; an' I'll maybe be here after you're found out, an' threw out. Mr. Hugh Menzies is a dacent

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man,' sez I, ' an' a Christian man, an' he'll never send away an ould neighbour an' an ould friend at your instigation.' An' he won't, Master Bob, he never will. He'll never have the heart to put me out of the wee home. Thirty long years I've been in it. My three childer was born here, the two wee girls that died, an' the boy that's run away an' left his ould mother to the mercy of the world. An' my good, kind man. He died sittin' at this hearth, in the very chair you're on this minit." Bob felt his back chill. " Aw, if he was here now, if he was only here now ! "

The picture of the old woman's desolation oppressed the boy's soul to pain. All thought of self left him. It was in an impulse of pure compassion that he drew forth his ten shillings and pressed them into old Sally's hand.

" Uncle Hugh told me you owed him ten shillings, Sally," he stammered. " Don't cry, *please* don't cry. There's ten shillings. You won't have to go now."

Old Sally dried her tears, and looked at the money in her palm. The boy quailed as he thought of the scene of wild gratitude and relief that would follow. To his bewilderment she accepted his bounty quite composedly.

" Thank you, Master Bob," she said in a matter-of-fact voice. " God bless you, dear. You've a kind heart like your uncle. Of course you have plenty. But many a child of your age wouldn't have thought of this. Wait till I put it in my wee cupboard." She rose briskly, and went to a recess in the wall. When she had locked the cupboard door again, she stood a moment or two, thinking. " Master Bob," she said, " say nothin' about this to that woman—or to your uncle, or anybody. That's a bad woman, Master Bob ; an' she would want to make out I coaxed the money from you ; an' maybe your uncle would believe her. But God bless you, dear, again. You've your poor father's kindly heart. He never passed the door but he gave me somethin'. Auch—auch ——" Sally became suddenly feeble again, and hobbled toward the fireplace. " This has been a sore day on a poor old creature like me. Auch—I think I'll make a drop of tea. Would you have a drop, Master Bob ? "

The boy took this speech as his dismissal, and made his way slowly along the road. He was conscious of an anti-climax. The great act of renunciation had been accomplished, and where was the glow of virtuous satisfaction ? His heavenly reward he had thrown away by unwilling giving, he knew ; but now even his earthly recompense seemed to be eluding him. He had expected voluble and tearful gratitude, and even shrunk from the thought of it ; but from Sally he had had barely thanks. In his day-dreams he had imagined his beneficence accidentally coming to light, and had modestly glowed in the praise of his fellowmen ; but now he wondered if the world might not share his awakening doubt of his own wisdom, and even hint ridicule. Yet he did not regret his kindness to Sally. If his ten shillings could be magically restored to him he knew he would give them back to her. Gradually light began to dawn in his puzzled mind. It was as Sally had said. There was no obligation of gratitude due from her to him. Compared with her indigence he had plenty. The uncomfortable burden of philanthropy settled on Bob's shoulders, thenceforward to insinuate misgiving into all his pleasures. He quickened his pace and strode manfully up the hill from Sally's house, fighting down the thought that when he arose that morning there had been thirteen shillings in his money-box, and now there were but three.

III.

NEXT day being Saturday and a school-holiday, Bob, as was customary, breakfasted late, and alone. When he went to the kitchen afterwards for his boots, he found his uncle sitting by the fire, waiting for him.

" Bring your chair over here, Bob," said Mr. Menzies in a mysterious whisper. " I want to say something to you before Mrs. Ross comes in. You remember my telling you that I meant to put Sally Flanagan out if she didn't pay me her arrears of rent. Maybe you thought me severe on the woman. It came into my head once or twice that you did. But I had a reason, Bob. I wanted to teach you a lesson, to show you what comes of softness, and what's the result of insisting on your rights.

" Now listen to this. Yesterday morning I sent word to Sally Flanagan to pay or go out. I had been soft with her for twenty weeks, and yesterday I turned hard. And what happened ? What do you think happened ? "

" I—I don't know, uncle," said Bob, summoning up as good a pretence of wonder as he was able.

" She paid me," said his uncle, impressively. " She sent up this morning and paid me ! It's not well, Robert, my boy, to be too hard ; always remember that ; so I sent her back a shilling by the messenger, wee Peter Maguire—I hope he doesn't stick to it, though I gave him sixpence to keep him out of temptation. Now, what lesson should you take out of what has happened ?

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I'll tell you: 'Insist on your rights, or you'll be bamboozled!' You see now that your uncle knows what he's talking about."

MR. MENZIES leaned back in his chair and scanned the boy's face anxiously to observe whether the lesson had sunk in. As for Bob, he gazed steadily into the fire, lest he might betray himself. Here was a development of his action that he had never dreamed of. He was ashamed for his uncle, whom he had caused to become ridiculous before him; but, worse still, it was clear that though he had for the time relieved Sally's difficulties he had closed the gates of mercy on her for the future. With dismay he saw himself condemned by conscience to subsidize her with sixpence a week till her death. Life had suddenly become very difficult. He longed to go away and think. But his uncle was speaking again.

"Here's the money," said Mr. Menzies, triumphantly, groping in his waistcoat pocket. "Don't forget the lesson you have learned this morning, Bob. Being hard has been worth eight and sixpence to me—after all, what about eighteenpence?—and it'll be worth thousands of pounds to you before you die."

The boy looked at his uncle's outstretched hand, and saw two half-crowns, a florin, a shilling, and sixpence. He looked again, incredulously. There was no doubt possible. His eyes had not deceived him. But Sally had. Sally had. She had taken his ten precious new shillings, and all the time had possessed enough money to pay her rent. He felt hot all over at the thought. How *mean* of her, how mean! He had never imagined such deceit. Indignation flamed within him. He would march straight down the road to Sally's, and tell her what he thought of her. Impatiently he listened to the rest of his uncle's homily, then sought his cap.

As he quitted the house doubt assailed him. Could there be any mistake? Had his uncle brought out of his pocket the actual coins received from Sally, or just the same amount, as an object-lesson to drive home his sermon? Bob hesitated. Perhaps it was better to be certain. He saw Mrs. Ross coming from the farmyard, and decided to pump her.

"I suppose you know Sally Flanagan has paid uncle, Mrs. Ross?" he ventured.

The housekeeper sniffed.

"Oh, aye, Bob," she answered, dryly "She has paid him."

Bob shuffled from foot to foot irresolutely. An impulse to confess his share in the transaction assailed him; but he remembered Mrs. Ross's hostility to Sally, and fell back on the indirect method.

"Do you think she had the money all the time, Mrs. Ross?"

The housekeeper banged down the buckets she was carrying.

"I don't know whether she had or not, Bob," she said with vehemence. "It's very likely. But it wasn't her own ten shillings she sent your uncle." (Bob's heart thumped.) Mrs. Ross paused and compressed her lips. "H'm, I don't know should I tell you—I will. It'll maybe keep you from following in the footsteps of that old idiot. Your uncle gave her the ten shillings. He sent Henry Lamour down with it to her yesterday after I'd come back from givin' her notice, an' gave him a shillin' not to tell anybody. But of course Henry came straight to me. Did you ever hear the like of such a man in your life as that uncle of yours?—the ould soft gawm. Mind you, I know he had some fool notion of teachin' you a lesson—he let that out to me—but that makes it no better. To send thon greedy, two-faced ould baggage the money to pay her rent, an' then let on he was pressin' her; an' all the time her curlin' up her lip at him, an' talkin' about him behind his back. Aw, dear, dear. The country was laughin' at him before, but it'll be holdin' its sides now. I'm near ashamed to be lookin' people in the face myself."

Mrs. Ross picked up her buckets and went off. Bob scarcely remarked her going, but stood in the middle of the yard, half-stunned. Shame flooded his soul. An abyss of humiliation yawned before him. If his uncle was a laughing-stock, what would *he* be when old Sally told about him, as he knew she would? His soul sickened at the prospect. At home, at the forge, at school, he saw himself the helpless target of derision. Mrs. Ross would laugh at him. Even his uncle would laugh at him. He couldn't bear it. Life would be intolerable. He pictured himself ending his tortured existence in the gloomy waters of the big bog-hole.

What could he do? What *could* he do? Ah! He would appeal to Sally. He had been good to her. She had got his ten shillings. Surely that would satisfy her. If he besought her mercy surely she couldn't be so cruel as to betray the shameful secret of his gullibility. Breathless, half-sobbing, he stumbled along the road to her cottage.

He paused a moment or two before raising the latch, and strove to regain command of himself. He must dissimulate, he knew that; though his overwrought feelings impelled him to throw himself on his knees and beseech her with tears.

He opened the door; and at the sight of

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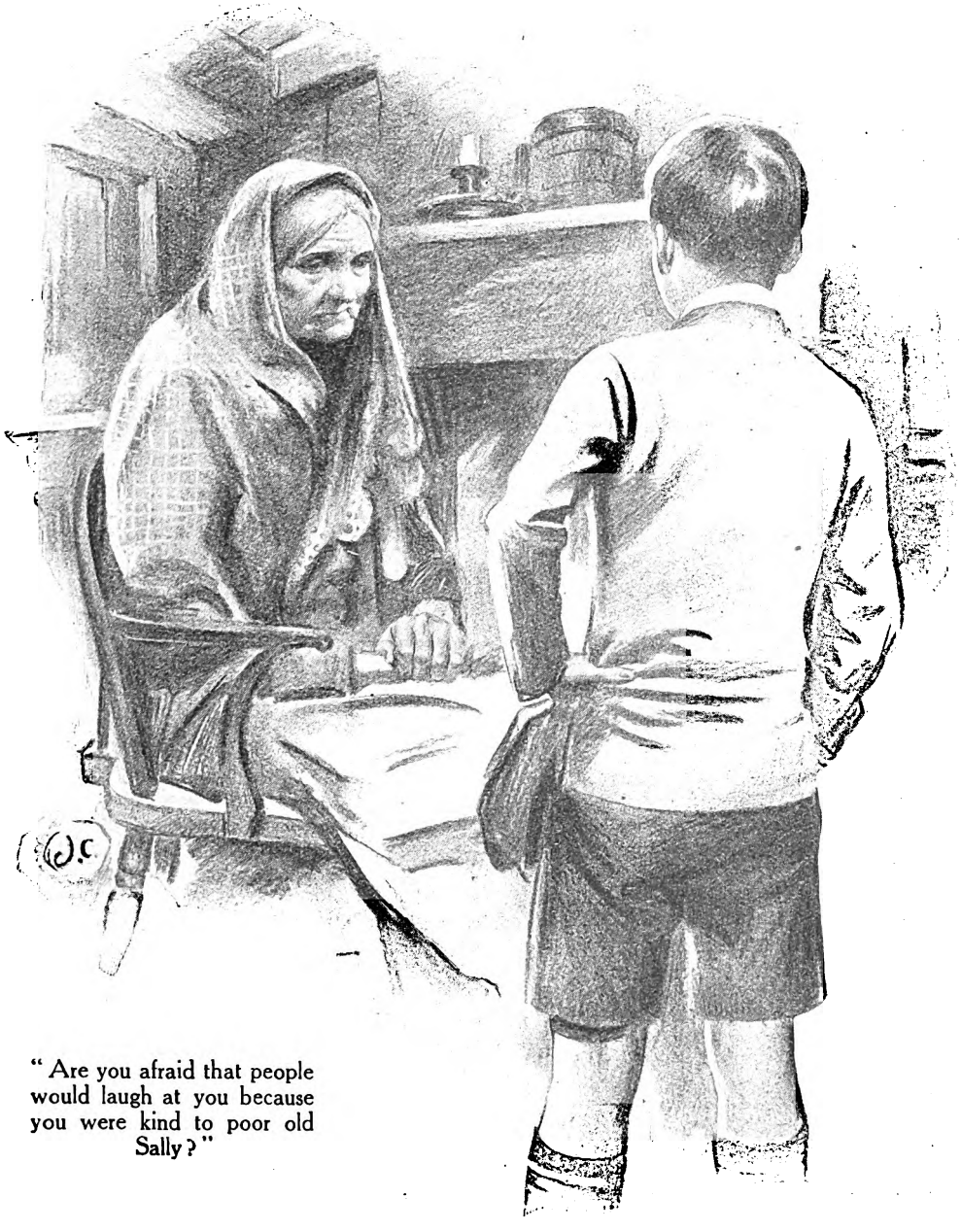

"Are you afraid that people would laugh at you because you were kind to poor old Sally?"

her hypocritical face little Bob Menzies first knew hatred.

"Sally," he said—"Sally." His voice trembled a little in spite of himself. "I—I gave you ten shillings last night; and I just came to tell you that I would rather no one knew about it."

The old woman looked at him shrewdly. A slow smile re-creased her innumerable wrinkles.

"Is that what's botherin' you, dear?" she said. "Are you afraid that people would laugh at you because you were kind to poor old Sally?"

The boy's self-command deserted him suddenly.

"Please don't tell, Sally," he entreated—"*please*."

The old woman did not answer. Her toothless gums showed in a silent laugh.

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"Sally," he cried desperately, "I have three shillings in my money-box still. I'll give you that, too."

The old woman hobbled forward and laid her hand on his hair.

"Well, well, well," she said; "is that all you think of poor ould Sally? I'll not take your three shillings, child; an' I'll tell nobody nothing. You're a good, foolish child. You didn't say anything to your uncle about the ten shillings—or to Mrs. Ross?"

Bob shook his head. He was almost certain that if he spoke he would burst into weeping.

"Say nothing, then, dear, to either of them. Your uncle might be vexed, an' that woman would never forgive you for keepin' me off the roadside when she thought she was rid of me. An' you'll always be kind to me, Master Bob, if ever your uncle is hard—won't you, son?"

Bob nodded, and, turning, hurried out of the cottage. Relief and shame contended in his bosom. He blushed for his panic. He must never be so foolish again. And he had wronged old Sally. She wasn't so bad as in his haste he had deemed her. She had refused his three shillings. But then she had continued to deceive him about his uncle's behaviour to her.

The sudden revelation of the complexities of life and character puzzled and dismayed the boy. Things would never be so simple to him again. Though he did not then know it, the Bob Menzies who walked soberly homeward from Sally Flanagan's cottage was a different boy from the one who had sat at the kitchen fireside with his uncle but two nights before.

ACROSTICS.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 182.

(The Second of the Series.)

FROM office, from townhouse, from villa, from flat,
Go holiday-makers to this and to that;
In this there are fields, rivers, hedgerows and trees,
At that dancing waves, yellow sands, and salt breeze.

1. Here are acrobats, horses, hoops, clowns gay and silly;
One in London, much altered, is called Piccadilly.
2. A horrible giant of fairy-tale days,
With cannibal diet and blustering ways.
3. More useful when open than shut, it is plain;
Companion, well ribbed, that you take in the rain.
4. Fate vengeful, retributive justice, is this;
You'll find me inside, closely followed by sis.
5. A Cinema Palace in London, and yet
A town in the fair land of Italy set.
6. Three monarchs of England were called by this name—
The first, Lion-hearted Crusader of fame.
7. Old times are departed, old days left behind;
Three-quarters is mineral not yet refined.

BOODLEBAR.

Answers to Acrostic No. 182 *should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor,* THE STRAND MAGAZINE, *Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on September* 11*th.*

To every light one alternative answer may be sent; it should be written at the side. At the foot of his answer every solver should write his pseudonym and nothing else.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 181.

FISH-TAILED damsel with a comb,
Mighty monarch of the foam.

1. Of a molehill do not make it.
Rhymes with fountain. High, I take it.
2. Did with first dress problem grapple,
And is blamed for Adam's apple.
3. Harsh this file, and grating, very,
Good united to a berry.
4. Most attractive, I admit,
Even iron flies to it.
5. If from friends you must be parted,
Bid them this in tones warm-hearted.
6. Best when to its model nearest,
Flattery in form sincerest.
7. Little hollow in some faces,
Gives a smiler added graces.

BOODLEBAR.

1. M	ountai	N
2. E	v	E
3. R	as	P
4. M	agne	T
5. A	die	U
6. I	mitatio	N
7. D	impl	E

Solvers who write to the Acrostic Editor and desire answers to their queries should, with their letters, enclose stamped addressed envelopes, and he will endeavour to reply.

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How an Execution was Photographed

By Sidney Sutherland

Many strange things have been done and many grave risks taken by Press photographers in search of startling pictures. It is doubtful, however, if the annals of the craft contain a story more sensational than that which is told in the following article—how two American pressmen obtained, in spite of the strictest police precautions, a photograph of Ruth Snyder as she sat in the electric chair to pay the penalty of death for the murder of her husband. The ethics of this journalistic "scoop" have been widely debated, but we publish the article, not as a comment on that aspect of the affair, but entirely for its interest as a revelation of human boldness and ingenuity, however misplaced.

I WAS one of the witnesses at the execution of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray. I was there with eighteen newspaper reporters as the official guests of Warden Lewis E. Lawes of Sing Sing Prison, New York, in conformity with the statute which provides that for each person executed there shall be twelve witnesses—two physicians and ten other persons.

For this double execution of Mrs. Snyder and Henry Judd Gray, her accomplice in the murder of Albert Snyder, her husband, Mr. Lawes had selected twenty newspaper men from some one hundred and twenty-five applications.

Ruth Snyder, the executed woman.

And they were sent there for the sole purpose of watching the lightning strike Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray and immediately thereafter writing in every minute detail the picture they had watched. Whatever the picture they witnessed might turn out to be, that was the thing to be written about for the waiting world.

Now, it had occurred to Harvey Deuell, city editor of the New York *Daily News*, just as it undoubtedly had occurred to many other city editors, that a photograph of

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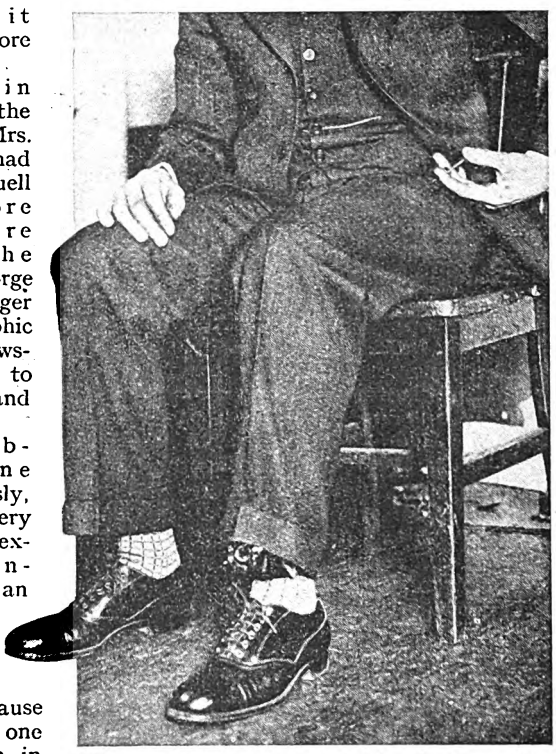
what took place in the death-house would certainly be the best picture—more impersonal, more accurate, a far more truthful account of the execution than the best story written by the best reporter present.

That few pictures had ever been taken of a legal electrocution, and especially that no picture had ever been taken of the execution by electricity of a woman, was true, and such a picture might or might not be in taste, but there could be no question whatever that such a picture would be the only *altogether truthful* report of her death. And if its grim realism served to further and enhance the only purpose of any execution —the hope that it might prove a deterrent to potential murderers — then it would be even more justified.

So, early in December, after the exact date of Mrs. Snyder's death had been fixed, Deuell and Theodore Dalton, picture editor of the *News*, and George Schmidt, manager of the photographic studio of that newspaper, began to discuss ways and means.

It must, obviously, be done surreptitiously, because the very novelty of the experiment condemned such an idea in the mind of the warden; and it must be done successfully, because failure is the one unpardonable sin in newspaper enterprise.



The small camera, concealed by the trouser-leg of the photographer, was worked by the cable release in his pocket.

A few paragraphs ago I said that "I was there with eighteen reporters." That makes nineteen; whereas Mr. Lawes had invited twenty. Well, there were twenty of us there, but one of us was not a reporter; he was a newspaper photographer borrowed for the occasion from the Chicago *Tribune*.

To ensure both surreptitiousness and success, Deuell decided against any New York City photographer, because he would be recognized both by the reporters, who have often worked with local photographers, and by the other camera-men, who were escorted outside the prison gates four hours before the time set for the executions.

The New York *News* borrowed me from the staff of *Liberty* to make the report for that paper, and obtained an invitation for Thomas Howard to do the same for the Chicago *Tribune*. Howard was the photographer who took the picture of Ruth Snyder seated in the electric chair.

And here is the way in which the photograph was taken:—

Early in 1925 a man walked into the offices of the New York *News* and offered a small camera for sale. It was examined with interest as a curiosity. It was two inches wide, three inches high, and three inches deep. The plate size was two and five-sixteenths by one and three-quarter inches. Called a Goerz camera, it was equipped with a Goerz-Dogmar lens whose focal length is sixty-two millimetres, approximately two and one-third inches.

The compur shutter, between the front and rear lenses, works from one second to one-three-hundredths of a second. The man who brought it in wanted twenty-six dollars and ninety-five cents for it.

Now, the world is filled with two kinds of persons: those who want their pictures in the paper and those who want them kept out! For the purpose of foiling the latter class the manager purchased the little camera, because it can be concealed in a cupped palm, its truthful, unbiased little lens eyeing the reluctant subject between two fingers.

The tiny camera had been used several times during the three years it was in the *News* offices, but mostly unsuccessfully. It was only when put to the supreme test in the death-room at Sing Sing that it came through triumphantly. This, in no small

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measure; was due to the chap who manipulated it that night, as you shall see.

When Deuell and Schmidt and Dalton conferred on the Snyder picture, many expedients for introducing the camera into the prison were examined. At first it was planned to attach it to the photographer's chest and make a small slit in his waistcoat. But this plan was discarded after numerous tests, because it was found that even the beating of the heart, to say nothing of respiration, blurred the picture.

Nobody seemed to know how much light there would be in the execution-room; where the photographer would manage to find a seat; how far the electric chair would be from the camera; where the prison attendants would be standing; how long Ruth Snyder would be in the clutch of the straps. In short, every plan must necessarily confront the unknown.

After many other experiments with the camera attached to different parts of the body, it was decided to fasten it to the photographer's ankle. An aluminium anklet was then made. It was fixed immovably to the little camera with screws, and a buckle and fibre strap were provided to keep it in place on the ankle.

A specially-constructed plate held the camera rigidly to the photographer's ankle.

A cable release thirty-six inches long ran up the trouser leg to the left front pocket. The plunger to work the shutter could be operated by the photographer's hand in his pocket. Wide, bell-bottom trousers were purchased to conceal the camera.

Tom Howard had just been promoted from the studio of the Chicago *Tribune* to be the manager of the Pacific and Atlantic Photo Studio in Washington, D.C. While Deuell was wondering whom he could get to run the risk of taking such a picture, Howard wandered into the office on his way to his new job.

"Will you take a picture of Ruth Snyder in the electric chair?" Deuell asked Howard.

"I'll try," said Tom.

So Schmidt and Dalton and Howard rehearsed and practised with the little camera until the night of the execution.

At seven o'clock that night everybody was escorted to the outside prison gate except the invited guests and witnesses. For four hours Tom endured the torture of the camera strap, so tightly had he drawn it to prevent its slipping. The other newspaper men looked curiously at the stranger from Chicago, but I helped avert possible detection by telling Tom to sit quietly apart and hold his head.

I also helped cover him up by pretending that the notes I was writing and sending to the New York *News* staff men outside the prison gates were also being forwarded over the leased wire to the Chicago *Tribune*. This helped Tom to ease the agony of that tight strap.

There were numerous notes to be sent out, because lawyers for the condemned pair were running in and out with (literally) eleventh-hour schemes to prevent the execution.

Priests and Protestant preachers were going to and coming from the unhappy prisoners, bringing word of their condition, their last statements.

All these things were jotted down by the reporters and the slips sent out to the gate, where fellow-journalists telephoned or telegraphed them to the waiting millions.

At half-past ten, with the tension tightening about all of us, Warden Lawes summoned us to his private office. When we were gathered about his desk, he spoke a few words on death-chamber comportment, answered a few questions, such as to the actual condition of the doomed pair, what they had eaten, how they looked, what they had said, the order in which they would go to the chair, what disposition would be made of the bodies, whether they had been given opiates (which he denied), and so on.

Then he spoke as follows—and I give his exact words because they have been misquoted and distorted a thousand times since the famous *Daily News* picture was printed and commented on by a thousand editors:—

"Gentlemen, I have been informed that some of you are equipped with watch cameras—that is, cameras concealed in watches.

"Whether this is true or not I do not know, and I shall not have you searched. I wish, however, to inform you that the taking of a picture in the death-chamber constitutes an unlawful act. And I trust all

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of you to do the right thing. Please do not exaggerate what you are about to see.

"I cannot tell you what to write, but I do ask you to do one thing: give your readers an exact picture of what takes place, of what you see."

Well, the only readers who got an exact picture, as the warden wanted, were the readers of the *Daily News*.

When the warden finished talking to us—and he was labouring under a terrific strain, for he is the outstanding opponent in the U.S.A. of capital punishment and was about to kill his first female prisoner—he asked us to step outside and sign the official attestation that Ruth Snyder and Henry Judd Gray had been done to death as the taxpayers of New York commanded.

He allowed us to sign this statement before we went into the death-chamber, because he knew how eager we were to dash outside to write our articles after it was over. While we were signing this, Tom nudged me and nodded towards three other men.

I do not know who they were, but two of them had large nickel watches in their hands, and these watches contained cameras! Another was carefully shielding his chest against the jostling reporters: he had a little camera strapped to his body! The warden had been correctly warned all right.

A few minutes later we followed the warden down a hall, across a veranda, and along a little path that runs between the rose bushes in the yard to the south gate.

Tom was limping beside me, his face white with pain under the cold January stars. We were in the middle of the line, some six pairs ahead of us. It occurred to me, ignorant of what we were to find in the death-room, that we were pretty far back, and that if we were forced to sit behind other reporters there'd be no chance to take anything but a picture of their legs beneath their chairs.

"Can you run?" I whispered to my crippled companion.

"I guess so. Why?" he asked.

"Come on," I said.

Without further question he followed me as I stepped out of line and darted towards the head of the procession. The other reporters growled curses as we stumbled across the flower beds and slipped in behind the warden. They did not know why we were running, but just growled on general principles.

A moment later a group of keepers at the gate turned their flashlights on us. Inside we went down a gravel path, turned to our right, and came to a low building. In its centre was a lighted door.

The first thing we saw as we stepped inside was the chair, standing on the cement floor, its golden-oak arms wide, black straps hanging as tentacles on all sides. A square of thin black rubber surrounded it.

As the warden and State officials removed their hats and ranged themselves along the wall at the left, I saw that we, the official witnesses, were to find seats in five pews to the right and facing the chair. Without delay Tom and I strode to the front row and sat down, Tom against the wall and with a clear side view of the chair.

WELL, we had done all we could. Tom was guarded against detection on the right by the wall. I could shield his left ankle by draping my overcoat on my right knee. From only one place could the bulging little camera be seen when he lifted his trouser turn-up—from the chair itself. But standing along the wall behind the chair, and, it seemed to our nervous consciences, staring straight at Tom's ankle, were three uniformed guards with folded arms and roving eyes!

"Good Lord," whispered Tom, "look at those birds behind the chair!"

I nodded. "Well, it can't be helped," I murmured out of the side of my mouth. "Do you think you can manage it?" I inquired anxiously. "Are you going to take the chance?"

"Yes!" said Tom.

One of the curious things about the electrocution was the absence of any human agency. From the moment we entered until we left nobody said anything, nobody gave any signals, nobody took the initiative. It seemed then, though the thought became more poignantly graphic afterward, that the Imponderables took charge.

The executioner examined the straps, the wires in the conduits, the electrodes. When he finished, the door opened as if by magic and the wailing woman appeared. Hands acting without audible or visible command fastened her in. The current was applied and turned off without instructions by mouth or sign.

It was all so impersonal, so remorseless, so mechanical, so definitely conclusive! It struck me, as a cold wind through a broken pane, that what I was witnessing, that what was taking place, was the epitomized experience of the ages, the answer of society to homicide. It was the will of ten million taxpayers functioning without apparent human guidance or individual wish.

As we sat staring at this fatal process I felt Tom move slightly.

"How much longer are they going to keep her there?" he whispered.

"I don't know," I said. "Did you get it?"

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"Here it goes now," he replied.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw his lips move as he slowly counted six. Then his left arm relaxed—and I knew he had taken the picture. He withdrew his hand slowly from his pocket, let it steal toward the crease in his trousers at the knee, and attempted to lower the turn-up over the camera.

Warden Lawes of Sing Sing Prison.

Suddenly he caught his breath and stiffened. I didn't know why till later. His trouser leg had caught on the top of the camera and he couldn't hide it—with three guards staring at us!

Tom Howard, used to crises, thinks quickly. He pretended to be overcome with horror, groaned feebly, and seemed to topple forward. I knew nothing of his dilemma and thought he was fainting. But as he lurched forward in his seat his left hand slid down and clutched at his turn-up.

An instant later he had straightened up and was watching the figure in the chair. He had lifted the turn-up and dropped it over the little camera!

At five minutes past eleven the electrician pulled out the black handles of the switchboard and leaned against the door jamb of his alcove.

Dr. Charles A. Sweet, prison surgeon, adjusted his stethoscope, stood a moment listening, removed the earpieces, stepped back while his assistant, Dr. Kearney, duplicated his office, and then turned to the white-faced group of reporters.

"I pronounce this woman dead," he said in a dry voice.

Warden Lawes leaned weakly against the wall, his face averted.

Thomas Howard, who took the photograph.

Suddenly the death-corridor door opened again and Judd Gray strode in. I never saw them take Judd Gray from the chair. When Dr. Sweet had told us he was dead, I glanced around, saw that nobody was watching us, and nudged Tom.

"Let's get out of here," I whispered.

He gathered his coat and followed me, trying to conceal the anguish from the camera strap. We walked out of the room before anybody else had moved, and quickly reached the south gate. The gatekeepers let us pass. We began to run across the flower beds.

In the open, near the warden's office, our motor stood with racing engine, the driver fondling a jack handle to repel any reporter who tried to board our car, first in line.

The motor roared and we flew at fifty miles an hour the five hundred yards to the outer gate, Tom loosening the ankle strap and groaning with relief. There another group of keepers bathed us in their electric torches and motioned us out to where a huge throng parted to let us through. We sped down the road a couple of hundred yards to where one of the *Daily News* wires was installed.

I leaped out and a *News* reporter jumped in with Tom, and they dashed away the thirty-five miles from Ossining to the *News* building on Park Place in New York City. They had a wild ride. When they entered the city limits, followed all the way by a spare car in case anything happened to the first one, the Ossining driver became a bit confused, so Tom and his friend jumped out and into a taxicab.

That cab was too slow, so they left it and climbed into another, which raced through the night, violating all traffic rules and reaching the *News* in less than an hour from the time Tom left the prison.

There was a breathless hush in the newspaper office, from managing editor's den to the presses far below and the circulation lorries outside, as everyone waited to see what the development of the tiny plate would reveal.

When it was seen that a great picture scoop had been achieved, the staff got to work at top speed, and a little later more than a million and a half copies of the *News* with the photograph on the first page were in the hands of eager readers.

Meantime, I had been escorted to a dwelling not far from the prison, where another telegraph wire had been installed. There two operators worked in shifts, taking the story over my shoulder as I typed it. And presently the countless millions of readers who subscribe to the Chicago *Tribune*, the New York *News*, and sixty other newspapers throughout the world which take that news service, were reading my report of what I had witnessed.

Which got the true picture of the death of Ruth Snyder? I think that those who studied the photograph which Tom Howard made will carry always in their minds a truer conception of what took place in the death-chamber than will those readers who merely read my inadequate chronicle of that ghastly scene.

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An Adventure on the Road

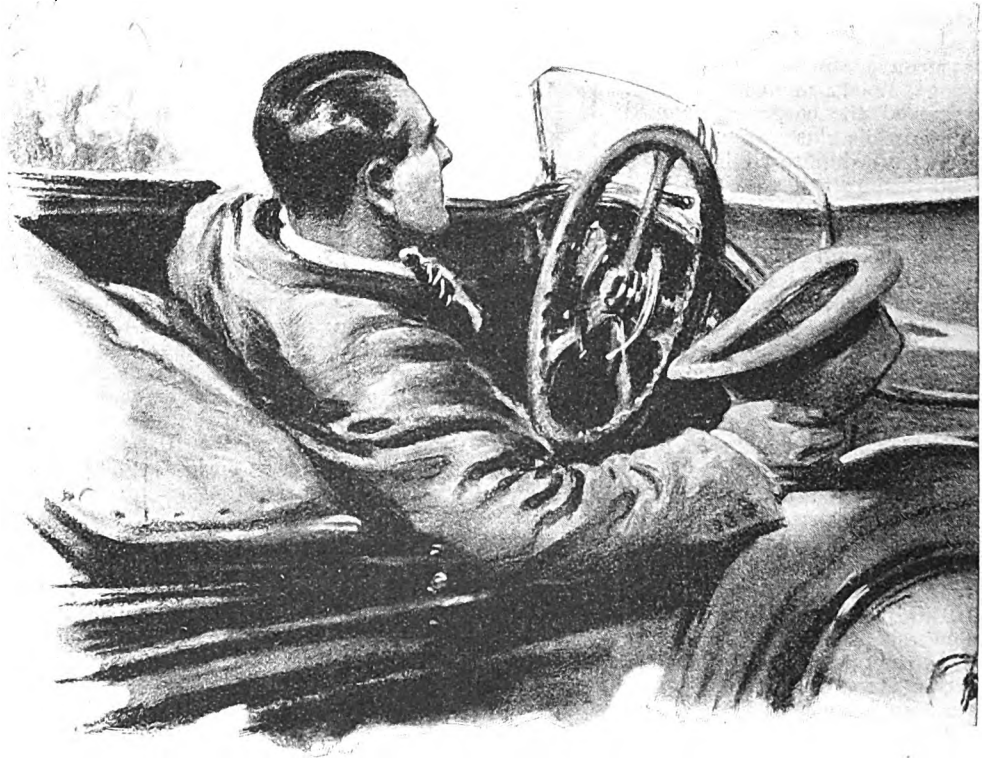
By

AGNES CROZIER HERBERTSON

Illustrated by
W. E. WIGHTMAN

THE road unwound itself in front of him in a long, silky ribbon. Not a side-track anywhere except now and again a footpath across fields or a narrow lane between low hedges. Stringer let the car slither along; the soft whirr of it seemed to lull him into drowsiness; his grey eyes all but closed, expression fled from his face. He presented, indeed, an appearance of handsome vacuity. Stringer quite often looked like that, and some folks were deceived.

A dullish sun provided more heat than one would have expected of it; Stringer was warm in spite of the wind that stirred his fair hair. Quite a lot of what he would have described as "jolly noise" was going on about him: the singing of birds, the monotonous drone of some agricultural machine. Still, he felt a trifle bored—or did he only



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imagine he felt bored? Any interruption of his drowsy calm would be a bore. He was really, he told himself, quite pleased to be rolling up to town on this errand for Aunt Muriel. Quite as good a way of spending an afternoon as any other. And he liked Aunt Muriel, liked doing things for her; his liking had nothing to do with the fortune she intended leaving him.

A little spot appeared on the road ahead of him; it resolved itself into the figure of a man.

"And runnin'!" mentally ejaculated Stringer. "Imagine anyone wantin' to run in this weather! And what's he runnin' about *for*, any way?"

There seemed no apparent motive. The man was running towards Stringer and his car, a gipsy-like individual with a soft slouch hat half over his eyes and his trousers hanging raggedly about bare legs.

Stringer's half-closed eyes gave the man the laziest of glances. The car and the running man did not actually meet; for as they were on the point of doing so the runner turned and dived down a side-path.

"Suppose he knows what he's about," Stringer said aloud, and glanced casually down the opening as he passed it. The man had already disappeared; no sign of him; but that was natural enough, for the opening divided into two footpaths, both of which were hedged and neither of which was straight.

"Now that's a pity, for I should have liked to ask you for the story of your life," murmured Stringer. "Kind of freakish chap you must be, I fancy." He yawned, slowed down a little, the road was beginning to wind; anything might lie ahead.

Nothing did for a bit; Stringer drowsed along. A sign-post called to him that after three miles he would become acquainted with the village of Hammers Pond.

"Ought to frighten me," thought Stringer. He didn't know this bit of country by road. Had all the hamlets names that kind of threw themselves at your head? If he didn't feel so lazy it might be a good idea to feast—mentally—on all the sign-posts as he passed. Why didn't someone ask *him* to christen a village?

AT that moment the girl hailed him.

There was a little spinney on his left cut off from the road by a thick dark hedge which in its turn was broken by a stile—a rather primitive stile. 'Twixt hedge and roadway rollicked a bank in a series of holes and upheavals. From this bank the girl waved and shouted.

There wasn't another soul in sight, so she must be out to worry him. Stringer sighed and stopped.

He said nothing, merely gazed at her lazily. The girl, too, was silent for a moment, as if at a loss. She seemed perturbed; she was shy, she was blushing.

"But she may have stopped me, all the same, just to ask the time, or the way to—Hammers Pond," Stringer thought severely, knowing a good deal about the sex. He presented admirably, however, an aspect of sleepy idiocy.

"I—I hate stopping you," began the girl at last. Then she paused.

She was pretty, as pretty as eyes like cornflowers and amberish hair could make her. She would have been a lot more than merely pretty, however—so Stringer reflected—if she had had ideas about dressing herself. As it was she had shoved herself into a pink frock—*pink*; and, as if that were not bad enough, had slung about herself a horrible kind of pouch arrangement by means of a shabby leather strap. To complete her tale of errors, a mackintosh of an indeterminate hue lay upon the bank and could only belong to her. A hideous garment, one only fit to be left at home, supposing by some evil chance one were forced to possess it. "As if rain," Stringer turned his eyes upward with a vacant piety, "could fall from such a sky!" She must be first cousin to the man who had imagined the day to be one suited to running exercise.

"Did you notice a man running in the road?" asked the girl, a little tremulously. Perceiving that she was to wring no encouragement out of Stringer she had gone on with the conversation herself.

"I did—silly ass!" murmured Stringer. He added brilliantly, "I was just thinkin' of him when you spoke."

The girl hesitated. Her cheeks grew pinker.

Her horrible clothes were not of a cheap variety, Stringer judged. Of course, she had nothing to do with that running ragamuffin. But she shouldn't have stopped him—Stringer—in order to gaze into his face with that pathetic expression. "Any relation?" he asked.

The girl coloured violently, and obviously with anger and annoyance. He had succeeded in wiping that pathetic expression from her face. Her eyes flashed as they met Stringer's, then they flickered, grew puzzled. Stringer's face, you see, provided her with no peg on which she could hang offence; it was benignly, lazily empty.

"Why, he was a tramp," she faltered.

"Didn't notice him much," Stringer said, relenting. "Just saw he was runnin'."

"You'd have noticed him more if he had helped himself to your purse!" the girl said, and drew a deep breath.

"Oh, I see, that's what he's done,"

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Stringer said in a different tone. "Why didn't you say so the very first minute?"

She blushed. "I didn't like to," she said.

Even in pink she was pretty as a picture when she blushed. She was most astonishingly diffident for a pretty girl, Stringer thought; quite different from the many pretty girls he knew.

"Much in it?" Stringer questioned in a matter-of-fact tone.

That question upset her lots more. Stringer managed to make out from her remarks, made to the bank while her head hung, that the purse hadn't had very much in it, but all she had with her and, after a pause, her return ticket to London.

"He didn't hurt you, I hope?" he asked.

The girl wasn't looking, and so did not find out what Stringer's face was like when he wasn't being "simple."

She shook her head. "He just snatched it," she said, carefully, "and ran."

"If only you'd been a bit quicker in explainin'," said Stringer, "I might have gone back a bit and got him."

"But you said you didn't notice what he looked like," the girl said quickly.

"There wouldn't be *two* men runnin'—on a day like this," expostulated Stringer.

"But he mayn't be running now," said she, a trifle impatiently. "He probably isn't."

Stringer admitted the truth of the observation. "'Sides, he turned down a footpath," he said. "I couldn't follow him in the car."

"Yes, I know he did," the girl said in a rush. "I could see him; I was standing on the stile."

"But *you* would know him again?" said Stringer.

She shook her head. "I don't think so; his hat was over his eyes."

"Then he has pulled it off this time," said Stringer, reflectively. "Well, perhaps he'll die of remorse. In the meantime, I'm on my way to London, I'll take you along."

The girl's eyes lighted. She looked eager, then dubious, then eager again. Stringer looked—oh, well, just as he had looked the whole way along.

"Nothing else to do, is there?" he said, lazily.

She seemed to agree.

When Stringer went on his way he had with him a pretty and excited girl in all the wrong clothes and a particularly ugly mackintosh.

She chattered, not about her loss, but about cars, roads, and pretty bits of country. That is to say, she asked questions which Stringer was able to answer.

He thought her rather a charming girl.

Hammers Pond proved to have an inn: he suggested that they should have some tea.

The inn was named The Duck and Pond.

The girl regarded it dubiously while she considered Stringer's suggestion. "Isn't there another inn?" she asked.

Stringer, in the act of getting out, gazed at her. "Now, I ask you, is it likely in a spot like this?" he said, reproachfully.

She thought it wasn't.

"And what's the matter with this one?" Stringer asked.

The girl didn't reply.

"And I am sure," said Stringer, "you would like some tea." His voice took on a wheedling note. "I'm pining for a cup," he added.

"It *would* be nice," said the girl doubtfully.

"Out you get," said Stringer.

THEY had tea in a room which had in it several tables, several chairs, an instrument that seemed to be a kind of missing link in pianos, and a moth-eaten bell-rope. Its walls, however, were broken by several windows kind enough to be open; and its many tables held flowers. Also, there were no other travellers present.

"Might have been a lot worse," said Stringer.

"Y-yes," the girl said, cautiously.

Stringer laughed. "Hard to please, aren't you?" he said.

"Oh, I like the place," she said, hastily.

"I'm glad you've made up your mind in that direction," said Stringer.

A tall, thin woman appeared to take their order. The girl seemed relieved when she saw her. Stringer was immensely tickled. "Dear me, is it propriety that's bothering her?" he thought. A faint interest stirred in him. This kid was certainly unlike any girl he knew.

A bowl of blue periwinkle flowers graced the middle of their table. Stringer said: "Now, if you were but wearing a gown of the same colour, my cup of bliss would be full. Lovely colour—blue."

She glanced at him suspiciously. "You don't like my pink frock?" she said, with a little quiver in her voice. The idea was perfectly absurd, but Stringer got it that she meant to shed a tear or two.

"Lovely," he said, glancing at it, "lovely." He drew a breath. Lying always seemed to get him in the chest. "But with blue eyes it seems a pity to descend to pink," he said, coaxingly. "Don't you think so?"

The blue eyes fell. But Stringer's had shown a real admiration; she plucked up courage. "I am really," she admitted, "rather fond of blue." She went on: "You see, Aunty chose——"

Quite intriguing the way she caught herself up.

"I, too, have an aunt," Stringer said,

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demurely. "My hat, though, *she* has an eye for colour. At a pinch I would let her choose a tie for me—not many women I'd trust that far. By the way, I'm on an errand to town for her now—calling at her flat to collect some of the things she left behind before going into the country. That tells you what she's like; only the nicest kind of women leave things behind them."

"Ah, now you're making fun," said she.

"Not a bit of it," said Stringer. "Ah, here's tea. And honey, too."

"We've got it in jars, and sell it—if you find you like it, sir," said the thin woman.

"I adore honey," said Stringer. "I'll have a jar."

The girl laughed suddenly. "You aren't a very serious character, are you?" she asked.

"That's just where you're wrong," said Stringer. "I take everything seriously, even honey."

"And blue frocks," suggested she.

"And blue frocks," he agreed.

"Aunty was serious," meditated the girl, "but she didn't talk as you do."

Stringer broke into hearty laughter. "Oh, I daresay I'm not like Aunty," he said.

The girl coloured, then she too laughed. "I've been thinking lately that Aunty was wrong about a few things," she said, reflectively.

"We're all wrong about something—that's half the fun of life," Stringer told her. He helped her to some more honey.

She poured out tea, rather charmingly. That demure air became her; but Stringer realized that its charm lay in a kind of subdued excitement under the demureness.

While they drank tea she told him that her name was Hayes—Rosemary Hayes. She was a teacher of botany, she said. (Stringer's grimace over that information was entirely mental.) She had an afternoon off and had come into the country to collect a few "Nature specimens." She showed him the contents of the pouch which Stringer loathed: a number of draggled plants.

Stringer's face betrayed but a mild interest in all this; but one who knew him well would have gauged him as interested beyond the ordinary.

"'Spose you haven't much knowledge of botanical specimens?" she asked him, hanging fondly over the wilted mass she had taken from her pouch.

"Not tuppence-worth," Stringer told her cheerfully. "Write me down an ass and you'll be giving me the right weight."

"But you're so kind," she said, consolingly, and Stringer chuckled.

"What part of London do you live in?" he asked her later.

She coloured, hesitated, then said "Putney."

How blue her eyes were! And her face was a charming shape: made Stringer think of some old picture he had seen—a Greuze, he thought.

He said idly: "Where abouts? I know Putney pretty well."

After a moment's consideration Rosemary said stiffly, "Stafferton Road."

"H'm," said he. "The church end or the end where the avenue is?"

"The church end," she told him, unwillingly.

Stringer said in a matter-of-fact tone: "Perhaps if we buzz along, I may be able to set you down at your door——"

"Oh, no!" Rosemary cried with decision. "You said you were going to Bedford Square. Well, if you will set me down by St. Pancras Church——"

Stringer eyed her. "You seem to mean it," he announced. "Well, in that case, you must let me lend you some money."

To his surprise her eye lighted mischievously. She looked prettier than ever: that light in her eye almost wiped out the pink frock, Stringer thought. "That would be fun," she said; then corrected herself. "It would be very kind of you, but really———"

"Well, you don't want to *walk* to Putney, do you?" Stringer asked her. "However, we can talk about that as we go along. I *may* be allowed to take you to—er—Stafferton Road in the end."

THEY had finished tea. The thin woman appeared in response to Stringer's pulling of the antiquated bell.

She invited the couple to step into the garden and see the hives from which the honey Stringer was purchasing had been derived.

Stringer accepted this invitation. Rosemary demurred, then announced that she would remain where she was.

Stringer's survey of the hives did not take long. He then settled his bill and returned to the inn's parlour.

"I sha'n't find her powdering her nose," he reflected. "I doubt if she has ever used powder." He thought that a pity.

The parlour was empty. Stringer threw himself into a chair and waited. He smoked a cigarette contemplatively; then he smoked another. He looked out of each of the windows. Nothing interesting to be seen. He tried the piano: its tone was all that its appearance had promised it would be. He looked at his watch.

Half an hour gone. Not a sound in the inn. Stringer approached the bell-rope, then turned away. The girl seemed to have faded into thin air; and what a fool he would look if he asked questions about her.

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"I had an adventure on the way up," he said.

He decided to carry the jar of honey down to the car and look about. She was such a queer kid. She might be hanging about in the road. . . .

Though, somehow, he didn't think she was about—not anywhere.

As he approached the car, a youth came out from the yard at the side of the inn.

"I got the young lady's bicycle out for her, sir," he said.

Stringer regarded him in a contemplative way. "Oh, you did, did you?" he said. "You—er—got out her bicycle."

"Yes," said the young man. He pursued, "I blew the tyres up a bit for her before she set off. She didn't want to wait, but I told her she'd get along quicker if her tyres was a bit harder."

"True, so she would," Stringer admitted.

"They just propped it up agin the side of the house when she left it in this morning afore going to the woods," said the youth; "but I put it into the stable, I thought as it would be safer there."

"Clever lad," said Stringer.

"So I got it out for 'er when she started forth 'bout an hour ago," went on the youth.

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"Oh, not so bad as that, about half an hour ago," murmured Stringer.

"When you was a-looking at the hives," said the youth.

Stringer quite understood what was expected of him. As he tipped the lad, "Do you understand the ways of women, William?" he asked.

"Alfred, sir, and thank you," said the bright one. He added, "My mother she advises me to have naught to do with gels."

"Oh, I should always rescue beauty in distress," Stringer told him. "You won't get much in the way of gratitude, perhaps, but you'll get something to think about that'll brighten your wits."

Alfred did not reply: the remark needed thinking over. He was still thinking it over when Stringer thrummed away.

"YOU'VE brought the wrong cushions, my lad," said Aunt Muriel; "but as the other things are right, I'll forgive you."

"The colour you mentioned went out of my head," Stringer pleaded. He was lying in a deck-chair in the front garden of the house his aunt had taken for the summer months. Miss Muriel Hawton was opposite him. A coloured lantern hung between them and a table near suggested that they had had a meal. Through the evening air came various soft summery sounds such as one hears in the country. They made Stringer feel quite sentimental. Quite a good thing that none of the charming and pursuing minxes his aunt knew had blown in. That reflection led him on to another: he called up a vision of a girl not much like his aunt's overwhelming and resplendent charmers, of a girl with the bluest eyes he had seen, with hair like amber, with a pink frock of a hideousness—

"I had an adventure on the way up," he said, lazily.

"Ran over somebody?" his aunt suggested, pleasantly. She was knitting; but that fact doesn't describe her. The lady had a humorous mouth and adventurous eyes, and didn't suggest a maiden aunt as popularly known. Indeed, she wasn't of that ilk.

"Dear me, no," said Stringer, loftily. He went on, "A girl who—er—seemed to think she had been robbed. I offered her a lift to town, but half-way up she disappeared."

"Didn't like the look of you," his aunt suggested.

Stringer was silent for a moment, considering that. He decided to leave it. "Ever heard of a Stafferton Road in Putney?" he inquired.

Miss Hawton shook her head. "I know Putney well; never heard of such a road," she said.

"Not with a church at one end and an avenue at the other?" prompted Stringer.

The lady shook her head again.

Stringer chuckled. "Well, you wouldn't know *them*, because I invented 'em."

Miss Hawton didn't look particularly puzzled. She said, "I suppose the girl said she lived in Stafferton Road and you invented the church and avenue to lay a trap for her on the assumption that she had invented the road."

"At times, my dear aunt," said Stringer, "you are positively brilliant."

"What kind of a girl was she?" asked the lady.

Stringer hesitated. After all, he wasn't going to give up the things about the girl that he liked. He said, "She had been botanizing, and carried a beastly bag full of specimens."

Miss Hawton went off at a tangent, hearing that. "I saw a few days ago that an old school friend of mine—Maria Fiddler—was dead," she said. "She was a great botanist, made something of a name for herself. She leaves a niece—living not far from here—I must run over and see the girl."

Stringer groaned. "Then we shall be having her over here," he said. "Another flower in the garden. Was there ever a woman with such a passion for girls?"

"I like them," said the lady; "and"—complacently—"they seem to like me." She added, "You might run me over to Puddleswade in your car on Wednesday."

"Charmed," said Stringer.

In looking over his car, Stringer noticed something under the seat. It was something that was green. Stringer picked it up and examined it closely, then he dropped it into a pocket.

Aloud he said, "And if the loss of it got you into a hole it served you right, my young friend."

STRINGER dropped his aunt at the Corner Cottage, Puddleswade, with a promise to return in an hour, and buzzed off in the direction of Puddleswade Church. The building didn't succeed in holding his interest for long, and he swung into the road. Almost before he knew it he was again reading the cheery information that a few miles ahead of him lay the delectable village of Hammers Pond. At the same moment the car, as if it didn't like the look of things, began to buck. Soon Stringer was lying in the road engaged in annoyed examination.

"Not running as well to-day as she was when I seed you on Monday."

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Stringer, who was scrambling out, turned to look at the speaker. A gipsy-like face, ragged trousers, hat drawn low over his eyes, the newcomer presented an aspect that was familiar.

"Ah, I remember. I noticed you. I wondered," Stringer murmured, "why you were running."

The stranger spat on the ground. "I was runnin' arter a job," he said, viciously; "and now I'd as lief run away from it as not. 'Go to Farmer Brown's,' they sez to me, 'afore he goes out at 'alf-past three, and he'll mebbe find you a job.' They sez to me, 'He be a good man.' Not he!—a real skinflint that man be, an' one as would work ye to the bone."

"I'm sorry to hear it," Stringer said, soothingly. "You'd expect a good job—after runnin' like that."

"You may expec' what you like these days, but what you gets is—slavery," said the stranger. "Cut out for slave-drivers, some folkses is."

"Five shillings," said Stringer, detaching them from his pocket, "might perhaps brighten life a little for the time being." He dropped them into the ready hand.

"Thank you, sir; thank you kindly. An' may ye get what ye're runnin' after," said the slave of Farmer Brown.

"H'm—thank you," said Stringer.

He turned the car and made again for Puddleswade. What was he running after? What might it be? Seemed as if it were just the Corner Cottage to fetch Aunt Muriel. And unless he bucked up a bit he would not be there to time.

AUNT MURIEL and Rosemary Hayes came down the cottage path together. Stringer was not particularly surprised—or, at all events, he showed no surprise. But when he saw the girl change colour at sight of him, a malicious satisfaction flickered on his face.

"Ah, here he is," cried Aunt Muriel. "My nephew, Allan Stringer, my dear. Allan, this is poor Maria's niece—Miss Rosemary Hayes."

She was wearing a blue dress; that gave Stringer satisfaction of a different kind; a vivid satisfaction that rather staggered him. And what a change the blue rag made—quite a nice rag by the way in its quiet simplicity—the girl was like another creature; as pretty a thing as he had seen.

But Stringer shook hands with her in the most casual way. "Topping afternoon, isn't it, Miss Hayes?" he said.

Miss Hayes agreed, a little breathlessly, that it was.

"Rosemary is coming over to Crewes to have tea with us on Friday," Miss Hawton told him, cheerily. "Later, perhaps—some tennis——"

"You play?" Stringer asked her.

She shook her head. "I haven't played since I was at school," she said.

Stringer opened his eyes wide with a super-innocent expression. "But aren't you still at school?" he asked.

Rosemary coloured hotly.

"Rosemary has been living with her aunt for some time—since she left school—and has been a good deal tied," said Miss Hawton.

"I see," said Stringer, with a mischievous smile.

Rosemary's good-bye to the couple was rather sudden. She vanished quickly into the cottage.

"Poor child, I fear she has been leading a most unnatural existence," said Miss Hawton. "Maria doesn't seem to have realized her youth and has given her no society of her own age. Maria was always a little—eccentric. She seems to have had some pleasant ideas: stipulated in her will that no black should be worn for her—but, goodness, some of the clothes that child has—she consulted me about them—they are dreadful. Maria chose them always, it appears."

"I liked the blue rag," Stringer said easily.

"Oh, she made that herself—quite recently, so she told me," said Aunt Muriel. "I'm afraid," she said, regretfully, "poor Maria was not very easy to live with."

"Oh, well, you will cheer the kid up. She can have a good time now," said Stringer.

"If you will help me, Allan," suggested Miss Hawton.

Stringer had been asked many times to help beautify the lives of girls; and had always known quite well what his aunt was driving at. He had therefore always been on the alert to protect himself from the lovely damsels who seemed to him so eminently well able to look after themselves, though his aunt professed to be unable to see it. This time, he was less on the alert. That little creature, with her blue eyes, amber curls, and her very amateurish attempts at escapades . . . Well, he need hardly buckle on his armour.

"But I mean to give her a jolly good talking to," thought Stringer.

"OH, bother," said Aunt Muriel, dropping a note among the breakfast things.

"Right on top of the marmalade," said Stringer, rescuing it. "Pretty handwriting, this."

"It's from Rosemary," said the lady.

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"She was to have come by the three-ten to-morrow. Oh, no, the last arrangement was that she should cycle over. She has been in the habit of cycling about the country after Nature specimens, it seems."

"Funny way of getting amusement," suggested Stringer.

"Maria's idea, I suppose," said Miss Hawton. "To return to Rosemary—here's her note to say she can't come—ricked her ankle, she says."

Stringer took rather a lot of marmalade, and made no comment.

"I'm horribly disappointed," said the lady. "Besides, I hate to think of the child all alone in that cottage, with only an old woman to look after her. It's bad for her."

"Perhaps the ankle isn't very badly ricked," Stringer proffered. He hesitated. "Like me to run over in the car and see if I can bring her?"

Aunt Muriel's sudden and surprised glee at this proposal showed plainly enough that she had been angling for it all along.

"At times, you have quite bright ideas," she said. She could restrain her words, but not her beaming smile.

STRINGER surprised Miss Hayes in the garden spreading a dyed garment over a clothes-horse. There was no sign of lameness about the lady. Stringer evinced no surprise at this.

"That garment," he remarked, "will dye the entire wooden erection blue if you let it drip like that."

"It has to drip," Rosemary said, crossly, conscious of crimsoning cheeks. "You mustn't wring it; you mustn't wring it or it will be patchy."

Stringer seemed really interested and kept his glance on the gown.

"Nice colour—blue," he said at last.

"I couldn't think of any other," she said.

"Oh, well, don't try," said Stringer. "You'll soon grow tired of dyeing, then you can *buy* some frocks of other colours. You must be quite well off. Schoolmistresses have spanking screws, I believe."

Rosemary gave him a flashing glance. "You know quite well that I am not a schoolmistress," she said, angrily.

"H'm, yes, I suppose I do," Stringer said, mildly. He went on, "Aunt Muriel didn't write; we thought I could just run over and see if you—if your foot were well enough for you to come back in the car with me."

"Well, you can see for yourself that there is nothing the matter with my foot," said Rosemary. There came over her face an expression Stringer had seen on it before—an expression that seemed to whisper of tears.

He said hastily, "Well, well, cheerio. I'd no right to drop in and catch you like this. I say, I'm awfully sorry——"

He looked it, and she, having glanced at him surreptitiously, took courage and became quite bullying. "No, you have no right," she flashed back. "And I suppose you think I invented the story about my foot so that you would come over with the car and fetch me!"

"You do seem to have rather a passion for driving in cars," Stringer said, smoothly.

"You think I am chasing after you," she burst forth.

"No, I don't," Stringer contradicted. "On the contrary, I think you are trying to back away from us, to get out of coming. You see, you are rather ashamed of yourself." He dropped down on the grassy plot that held the dyeing arrangement and crossed his legs like a mandarin.

Fury sparkled in the blue eyes. Why, the girl was quite waking up.

"Ashamed of myself?" she echoed. "Let me tell you, I am not in the least ashamed of myself. Why—why, should I not have an adventure if I want one?"

"No earthly reason against it," Stringer assured her heartily. "But I say, do sit down a bit and be a pal. I simply can't stand longer in this heat."

"It isn't a bit hot," she announced.

"Oh, well, have it that way if you like," said Stringer with a sigh. "Though I may mention that there is a small bead of—er—heat trickling down your cheek. Or shall we say that it is a tear of shame?"

Unexpectedly she sat down on the grass. Turning her head away, "I'm not ashamed of the—the other day, I tell you," she said.

"Then you ought to be," said Stringer. "You managed it all very badly, let me tell you. When you set out to—er—have an adventure, you ought to arrange that you don't give yourself away."

She turned then. "Do you mean to say that you knew——?"

"The whole way along," said Stringer, blandly.

Rosemary was silent. Plucking a blade of grass she played with it.

"Here's something else that's green," said Stringer. He brought from his pocket and tossed to her a little green purse. "I found it in my car," he said. "I guess you were a bit rattled when you found you had lost it in earnest."

She took it in silence, opened it, and played with the coins it contained.

"No railway ticket—but I didn't think there would be one," said Stringer. He straightened his back, gave her a charming smile, and said, "You see, I caught sight of you before you hailed me, and anything less like a damsel who had just been robbed

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of her purse can hardly be imagined. Shall I tell you how you looked——"

She shook her head. "And you seemed to see, to notice nothing!" she complained.

"You were enjoying that ride in the car far too much," went on Stringer "And any ass could see it was just the adventure of it. Then there isn't a Stafferton Road in Putney, and I invented the church and the avenue. You didn't see that, and that gave you away again. Your disappearance on a bicycle was rather a surprise to me; but I guessed you had taken fright. You meant at first to travel to town with me, didn't you?"

She nodded.

"One or two things about you. . . . Well, I guessed you were no schoolmistress before you—er—deserted me," said Stringer.

Rosemary pushed back her amber hair and looked at him straightly. Stringer met her eyes with a smile that she found wonderfully attractive and kind. "You see, I was fed up with every day being exactly the same," she said. "Nothing ever happened. Aunt Maria—she rather liked the days to be the same, but I didn't. When Aunt died, I thought I'd have things different. But I didn't know a soul. She didn't like meeting people, you see. I suppose because she was so much cleverer than most people. She has left me all her money, but I couldn't think of anything to do. So since she died I've just gone on as we did when she was alive. But I hated the days being so much alike. I went out looking for specimens as usual. That day, when your car came along, and you were looking so—so——"

"Stupid?" suggested Stringer, with an encouraging nod.

"No, sleepy," said she, kindly. "I knew you weren't stupid. Well, when I caught sight of you, I thought what fun it would be to stop you and get you to take me along with you. I'd noticed that tramp man running by, so I made up a story that he had stolen my purse. . . . I was only worried lest you should have noticed what he was like and go after him; but you said you wouldn't know him again, and—and——"

"Just the kind of thing I might have done myself," announced Stringer.

Rosemary's face cleared, her eyes lighted. "Do you mean that you would—you don't think me—you don't think me—forward?"

Stringer burst into a laugh that held more tenderness than he knew. "I think you a delightful kid," he said.

They smiled happily at each other. Stringer's eyes were no longer sleepy as they looked at her; Rosemary's held a childlike satisfaction.

"And now, what about getting ready to depart? This," said Stringer, looking round, "is very charming; but I fear that Aunt Muriel will expect to see something of you. Do you, by any chance, want to dye a hat before we start? If so, I beg you to think better of it."

Rosemary laughed, blushed. She didn't want to dye a hat, it seemed. She ran into the house to fetch one. Stringer, a radiant satisfaction still on his face, waited.

AUNT MURIEL from a window saw the car approach the gate. She peeped out at the radiant Stringer, at a transformed Rosemary. Approval showed itself on the lady's face.

This time—this time *it* was going to happen. The great event was coming off.

What had made Stringer fall in love with this girl, rather than with any of the other girls?

"It was that adventure on the road, I suppose," the lady thought, reflectively. She smiled. They imagined they were keeping the secret of it; well, let them think so. It was proving to be the adventure that comes but once.

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Once to Every Man

By Cosmo Hamilton

Illustrated by
W. JARVIS

CAPTAINS of industry, seated comfortably in their overstuffed, revolving chairs, tell the young man that if he licks stamps harder than anyone else has licked 'em, saves his pennies, works twelve hours a day, and goes to bed at nine, the top of the tree, or the Ritz tower in New York, will certainly be his address. They never say anything, oddly enough, about that odd little thing which is luck. And luck plays a big part in the game of life—a bigger part than the complacent dividend coupon-cutter is prepared to admit.

Take, for example, the case of Jimmy Goodwin—James Palmer Goodwin when you can see through the dirt on his post-box card. A hundred per cent. trier for fifteen years, he might, like many another good fellow, have gone down to his grave an industrious failure if luck had not butted in and given him a friendly shove.

When Jimmy Goodwin came out of college his father, who owned a big artificial manure business, wanted him, as fathers do, to go into his office. It wasn't because he was snobbish, but simply because he didn't like business of any kind, that the boy refused. He just wasn't cut out for toiling and moiling in the city marts. He had a consuming urge to write stories, with an occasional play for fun.

Well—the old man said that he didn't think it respectable for his son to go through life without doing any work, and the upshot of it was that, at last, Goodwin senior bellowed the old-fashioned "Don't darken my doors again" stuff at the very top of his voice. Literally ordered Jimmy out of the house; cut him off without so much as a single bag of bone-meal. He was a fine, old-fashioned man.

Young Jimmy wasn't a slacker. He took a cheapish and sheepish room on the west side of the city and started to manufacture great literary gems. The usual thing followed, of course. Occasionally he turned out something good enough to get past an editor, but so rarely did he actually sell that there was no fear of his developing either a swollen head or stomach.

After a couple of years, during which he sweated day and night, Jimmy decided that if he travelled and saw the world he might eventually become better acquainted with something worth writing about. But *Majestics* and *Aquitanias* were not quite in his line. And luckily for him he preferred the smaller ships. He worked his way from place to place on freighters, to tell the truth. And during all the years he spent abroad he continued to write with that dogged earnestness which sometimes carries men to the Presidency or puts them into jail. But his stories, like the proverbial bad ha'penny, invariably came back.

The man was fairly tall. He had a humorous mouth and whimsical china-blue eyes. There was something sincere and wholesome about him that made him liked by children, dogs, typists, and childless women. And even in old clothes—and his were always ancient—he somehow looked cleaner than the band-box men.

When he returned to settle again in New York he was nearing his middle thirties. And all he had with which to set up in business was a complexion tanned to the shade of an old briar pipe, a mass of mixed experience, a battered portable typewriter, and fifty hoarded dollars.

He managed to keep himself this side of the earth by selling an occasional story, and

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if industry alone had counted would have been a millionaire. Every night he sat up till all hours pounding out plays, moving-picture scenarios, and yarns about the people and places that he had stored up in his mind. And most of them were tolerably good. But——

On one of those bleak, snow-threatening afternoons of which February is so fond this dogged lad emerged from a Broadway cafeteria in which he had saved money by combining breakfast and lunch. Across the street a huge electric light sign proclaimed the fact that a film called "The Jewelled Sinner" was being shown to an eager world. This picture had made a big hit, and Jimmy felt that he ought to see it, if only for the purpose of keeping in touch with the type of thing that was meeting with the approval of the crowd. He had written many movie scenarios, but none of them had sold. And, anyway, it would be warmer inside the picture palace.

Taking his life in his hands, he pluckily crossed the street and walked in safety on shoes that make that slithery sound when their soles are paper-thin.

A long queue was lined up at the box-office. Jimmy joined on at its tail. "There's an awful lot of money in the picture business," he said to himself as he oozed up step by step. "Look at this crowd. Gosh, why don't my things click?" He considered, and probably rightly, that he had turned out many that were quite as good as most.

ARMED at last with a ticket, and thus minus an excellent meal, he made his way over the marble foyer towards Italian doors. A clean-cut attendant, decked out in a uniform which a General would never dare to wear, directed him which aisle to use. There he was received by another resplendent person who conducted him to a seat.

"Everything done regardless of cost," said Jimmy to himself. "Money, money everywhere, but not a copper for me." He smiled—not bitterly, but as an honest man who is just a little tired of plugging and never getting there.

The orchestra, almost a hundred strong, played something from "Lucia di Lammermoor" for no reason, but did it very well. Then came a Russian ballet—quite good in its way, and a recently-discovered operatic soprano from Goshen, Indiana—not so good. The audience chewed relentlessly its peanuts and aromatic-smelling gum through this part of the performance, while Jimmy dozed a bit.

Rather as an afterthought the picture was flashed on the screen, and those who were not sleeping were informed by a series of captions that "The Jewelled Sinner" was an original story, a Hugo Bortsch production, directed by Hugo Bortsch, and, further, as if it were a matter of really deep concern, that it had been made under the personal supervision of none other than Hugo Bortsch. This momentous information failed, or seemed to fail, to stir the audience. In fact, to be strictly accurate, it made no impression at all. Captions followed which gave the names of those geniuses who had directed the art, made the continuity, manipulated the camera, and edited the film, of those who had assisted these people, and of those who had assisted them. It is difficult to believe that not even this galaxy of talent took the house by storm. The audience was restless and impatient for the picture itself to be shown. How ungrateful people are!

Jimmy missed seeing the cast of characters. Just as that appeared, unfortunately, two heavily winter-fronted women were crawling over his feet, followed by their male escort, who trailed his top-coat leisurely across Jimmy's face. He wasn't frightfully upset at this loss, although he by no means relished the taste of the man's fur coat.

As soon as the picture started Jimmy sat up straight. A few minutes later his eyes bulged from his face like a pair of boiled onions. And soon after that he was perched gymnastically on the very edge of his seat, his body taut and rigid, his back hair standing on end. Had it been possible, in that dim light, for Jimmy to have been seen, it would have been noticed that, for some reason, he was doing strange things with his throat. He was indeed emulating a hasty eater who had swallowed a chicken-bone.

The cause of all this emotion was naturally brought about from the fact that Jimmy was watching a picture of his own, one that he had submitted to the film companies during the previous year. They had all rejected it. And now it was appearing before him like a very familiar ghost. Every foot of the darned thing was his by right of birth. Even the names of the characters were those that had leaked from his pen. Nothing except the title belonged to someone else. But—but why hadn't the man who had stolen the thing taken the precaution to alter it here or there? Why not at least have given the characters new names? It took his breath away. He was still gulping as the picture wound its way towards the close—every bit of it his.

At last speech came to save him from an apoplectic seizure. "Well, I'll be damned," he said.

The woman on his left, a person with one of those fat, unfinished faces, looked at him

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as if an unpleasant aroma had been suddenly thrust under her nose. "Young man," she said, with thirty-nine years of reluctant rectitude behind her tone.

"I must be dreaming," he said, addressing himself again. "I *must* be."

The film concluded with a cuddling bout in an aeroplane—just as he had written it.

Scrambling over people's feet towards the aisle before the lights went up, Jimmy failed to hear the stereotyped chaff about the building being on fire and making trade for shoe-blacks that were hurled at him. At that moment he was a man with a fixed idea. He was bent on lowering the record

A ravishing but vacuous blonde languidly informed Jimmy that the president of the company was in conference.

"Well, you'd better stop if you can't do so without using such language as that."

"Did you speak to me?" The man came back to earth.

"Yes; I said——"

The rest was drowned by the admonitory requests to "shush" and "dry up" that were issued by annoyed neighbours.

Jimmy felt his neck and ears grow hot. He sat well back in his seat and tried to make himself almost as small as he felt.

But he found himself completely and painfully enthralled by that picture—his picture—again. The rancorous glances of his outraged neighbour were wasted.

for speed between the theatre and the offices of the company which had made that film.

Suspicious looks were levelled at him as he raced out of the building, and once on Broadway he did the eel trick. The north and south traffic was making hay while the green light shone, but he didn't let that interfere with his progress east. Taxi-drivers invented new curses as they applied their squealing brakes or swerved at the risk of overturning their cars.

With a heaving chest he dived into the lift of the office building of Regal Pictures, Inc.; and, after maddening delays at unimportant floors, stepped boldly out.

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A RAVISHING but vacuous blonde—the type for whom gentlemen are said to have a preference in their more human moments—inquired about his business. Then, with coral-coloured plugs, she played a game that looked like chess on the telephone switch-board, screamed a few words into the receiver, and languidly informed Jimmy that the president of the company was in conference and might be there for a week. He might write in if he liked.

But instead of returning to the lift and home to kill a week he pushed open the swing doors that led into the main office and walked, with tightening nostrils, to the president's private suite. He knew the geography; he'd often—far too often—been there with manuscripts.

Pausing no longer than it took to rap on the door marked "Mr. Etzberg," Jimmy stalked into the room. That gentleman, deeply occupied with other though less important officers of the company, regarded the unwelcome intruder with amazement through a fog of smoke. He uttered an appropriate greeting almost without a thought.

"What the deuce do you mean by pushing your way in here?" He could barely believe his eyes.

"What the deuce do you mean by using a scenario of mine without handing over the boodle?"

An exasperated frown clouded the president's brow. "What are you talking about?"

"'The Jewelled Sinner,' of course."

The gasp from Mr. Etzberg was echoed by every man there. They gazed at each other with what their tamest title merchant always called "meaning looks." And then the frown on the president's face gave way to a seductive smile. "Sit down," he said, "and try one of these cigars."

As Jimmy applied a match to that prodigious Corporation Corona, Etzberg massaged the end of his nose between an artistic forefinger and a financial thumb. Whereafter, draping one plump leg over the other, he managed to find his voice. "It's the custom here for visitors to make an appointment with me, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Goodwin."

"Glad to know you, I'm sure." The great man shook hands cordially and introduced his staff. "I'm glad you dropped in. To tell the honest truth, we've been expecting you for rather a long time."

"That's an absolute fact," chimed in the brilliant literary gent who wrote all the illiterate publicity of Regal's yearly output. "We've been too astonished for words that you haven't come in before." The other officers confirmed this with many nods.

"Mr. Goodwin, when did you see 'The Jewelled Sinner' first?" Etzberg asked.

"To-day. I left the theatre a couple of shakes ago."

"May be said to have hurried, eh?"

"Hurried isn't the word. I came like Lindbergh on an Atlantic hop." The assemblage enjoyed the phrase.

"Had you heard before seeing the picture that there was any similarity between it and a little story of yours?"

"No. And it isn't a matter of similarity. It's my story word for word. I've got the carbon copy over at my room."

"That's lucky," said Mr. Etzberg. "Very lucky indeed. You were just a little surprised to find we'd used that little story without consulting you, eh?"

"Consulting and paying," said Jimmy. "I couldn't have been more surprised if it had rained ten-dollar bills."

Mr. Etzberg disclosed his teeth. "Tell me, Mr. Goodman," he said, "did you ever hear of anything unusual about the making of 'The Jewelled Sinner'?"

"Not a word. But I'm going to hear all about it before I leave this place."

"A very curious thing happened." The president spoke lightly and brightly. "We've all been quite amused."

The onlookers gave nice imitations of people who had enjoyed a joke.

"IT was like this, my friend. Something over a year ago we commissioned Rodney Scoville Betters to do an original story for Rosalie Delight. Well—about a month later he sent the manuscript in. He was sailing the next day for a long vacation in France."

"Oh?"

"By the time we'd all read it Betters was half-way across the Atlantic. Anyway, it was quite a fair job of work, so we shot it out to the Pacific Coast and paid the author's cheque into his bank account. The only thing we didn't like was the title—which we changed, if you know what I mean. Our contracts always give us the right to a little thing like that."

"Oh?"

"Yes, Mr. Goodall, indeed. Well, then, in due course the film was shot, cut, fitted, sent East, and after I'd said 'O.K.' was put on in this burg. It's doing—well, fairly so-so—not making what we call money, but sort of holding its own."

"In its twenty-third week," said Jimmy. "The advertisements give it that."

"I don't know the exact number of weeks, offhand, if you know what I mean. It's been here some time, I think, according

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to what I've heard. But to get on with the story—which is a movie in itself. When Betters returned from abroad I made an engagement with him to see the picture with me. For some queer reason he's mighty fussy about having his stuff doctored up. Now 'The Jewelled Sinner' had been done exactly as he wrote it, and I wanted to have the pleasure of proving that that was so."

"Oh?"

Etzberg had begun to dislike those "Ohs."

"Well, sir, we went along together and I shall never forget that day." He slapped his meaty thigh by way of emphasis. "Betters just sat there without saying a word. And all the time there was an odd expression on his face that I didn't know what to make of. I couldn't tell whether he was pleased or sore, or what he was. I was keen for him to like it because we wanted another story from him as soon as possible."

"But what has all this got to do with ——?"

"Just one minute, my friend. I'm coming to that right now. As I mentioned before, Betters didn't utter a syllable until the run was over and I asked him what he thought. 'Darned good,' he said. And with that he pulled on his sloppy felt hat—he always wears that kind—and we blinked out into the light. I was saying this and that about the picture for a bit, but he didn't seem to listen, though I didn't take notice of that. Half the time he doesn't hear what any of us say in this office."

JIMMY held on to his nerves, and asked himself, with wonder, how much more of this irrelevant tosh he could stand without going mad.

Mr. Etzberg twigged his expression, but smiled amiably. "When we got into this room and he'd lifted a cigar he whipped round on me with a flash and spoke at the top of his voice. 'Here,' said he, 'what do you mean by putting my name on that picture?'"

"You mean he—he denied having written the thing?" asked Jimmy.

"I didn't know what he meant. How could I? I thought he was mad about something we'd done and I asked him what was wrong. And in that dry way of his he said, 'Oh, nothing, except that I didn't write a word of the dog-gone thing.'"

"And then what?" Jimmy's pulse began to hammer.

"I told him he was crazy. You see, I'd read his scenario myself and *knew* the picture was his. And that I told him in no uncertain words. But I didn't get uneasy till he put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Etzzy, there's something funny about this business. Either there has been an extraordinary mistake or something's been put over on you. I assure you on my word of honour that that whole story is absolutely new to me.' Mr. Goodman, you could have knocked me down with a daisy."

"I suppose so." Jimmy's eyes were gleaming. They were getting somewhere at last.

"Well, sir, after a lot more talk we got into my car and drove over to Betters's flat, where he gave me the carbon copy of the story he'd sent in. And, sure enough, there wasn't a thing in it like 'The Jewelled Sinner.' I was on the point of having a couple of hæmorrhages when I'd finished reading it, but Betters, by this time, seemed to see something funny about it all and chuckled till I could have crowned him with a chair. At last I asked him what we were going to do. And all he had to say was: 'You can do what you darn please so long as you take my name off the film before you show it again.' A nice blow that. Huh!"

"Not very helpful," Jimmy admitted. "But he couldn't honestly have allowed——"

"Well—however, a fine night's sleep I had thinking about the mix-up." Mr. Etzberg heaved a sigh. "The next morning I questioned everyone in the office who'd had anything to do with the script, but couldn't find out a thing. It wasn't until the afternoon that one of the girls came in and gave me a sort of a clue. It appears she'd knocked a bottle of ink over on her desk and made such a mess of a couple of manuscripts that were lying there at the time that she had re-typed the first page of each of them. One, she remembered, was Betters's. And she thought that in re-typing those first pages she might have transposed the names of the authors—put Betters's name on someone else's story and the other person's name on Betters's. A very strange thing—if that is what *did* happen." He regarded Jimmy with a very searching gaze.

"Do you suspect collusion between this girl and me?"

"My dear sir!"

"In the first place, I don't know any girl in your office, and in the second, I haven't the brains to work out such a bright idea."

"I'm quite sure of that," said the president of Regal Pictures. "I mean sure that there was no collusion. But what I would like to know, Mr. Goodyear," he added, "is why you didn't return Betters's scenario, which you must have seen had been sent you by mistake." He narrowed his eyes again. Perhaps from force of habit.

"That's simple," Jimmy said. "When what I took to be my manuscript came back I glanced over the stereotyped covering

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letter without looking at the enclosure. You see, it had been to half-a-dozen other companies before coming here, and when you turned it down I concluded it was a wash-out and tossed it into a trunk with a lot of other rejecteds. I didn't even take it out of the envelope. That story of Betters's must have been eating its heart out all this time among my unwanted stuff."

"Yes—yes. Now there's one more thing, Mr. Goodbun. As soon as we discovered the mistake we sent out letters to every-one who'd had manuscripts returned to them about that time asking if they had received someone else's story. Did *you* receive such a letter?"

"No. I change my address fairly often. The letter you sent me has probably found its way back."

"Several of them did. We kept 'em. And while they are being looked up (Mr. Etzberg nodded to one of his officers to go and see about it), we might as well save time and arrange what you're going to be paid. We want to be as fair as we always are up here." He beamed, and endeavoured to glow with avuncular benevolence. "Mr. Braham can draw up the contract and you can sign it while you're here. And as soon as things have been checked up we'll mail you the money. Now then, what shall we say? Three thousand?"

Jimmy regarded the spittoon, and tilted his head a bit. And there was an awkward pause.

"Three thousand's a heap of money for something you never expected to get a solitary penny for." Etzberg rubbed his nose with a diamond ring.

And Jimmy passed his hand nervously over his mouth. "I don't consider three thousand to be——"

"Come, now, Mr. Goodboy. Tell you what I'll do. Four thousand and a complete settlement, see? We don't want you to go away dissatisfied. We don't do things like that."

"For a picture that's already run twenty-three weeks in New York——"

"Oh, why split hairs?" This from Mr. Braham. "Let's make it five thousand and close the thing right out."

This suggestion seemed at first to shock the president, but after a moment he gave a nearly generous laugh. "Very well, then," he said. "Let's do it. It's the company's money we're throwing about, not ours." The other officers joined him in his amusement over that.

"I'd rather think it over and let you know," said Jimmy, retrieving his hat from the floor and standing up.

"But why?" asked Mr. Etzberg, who was palpably shocked. "Why say 'No' to good money when it's staring you in the face? That's no way to get on in the world."

"I'd like to brood for a bit. I'll go and get the carbon copy of my story and the one by Betters that you sent in error and be back here in about—well, half an hour. How's that?"

"Just as you say," said Etzberg, spreading out his hands and raising his shoulders in the usual financial way. His gesture clearly said: "I am a little hurt by your attitude. And your stupidity in refusing good money is something new to me."

"I'll be back quite soon," said Jimmy, striding to the door.

"What would you say to *six* thousand?" But Jimmy was gone by that time—which was well for him. He might have fallen for six.

DOWN in the lift, along Broadway, and then West to his room in Fifty-eighth Street, he legged it with prodigious strides, though he wouldn't have taken a bet that his feet were touching the ground. It seemed to him that he was gliding over a golden path on skates. The people he passed looked happier than usual, and the lights in the shops shone with a most unwonted warmth, he thought.

He took the stairs of his dingy lodging-house four or five at a time. Like a burglar working in a hurry, James pulled papers out of an old trunk and flung them all over the room. Presently he came upon the carbon copy of his own story and paused to glance at it. Then the search was renewed. Again the manuscripts went flying like frightened birds until at last he found the envelope of Regal Pictures, Inc. It contained a scenario with his name on it, though he had never written the story. Betters's work, of course.

His next move was to call up the honest Betters and confirm this blessed change. Rodney Scoville Betters was the author of a string of "best-sellers." And he received large sums for his moving-picture rights. In spite of which he was mighty decent to Jimmy and went to the trouble of giving him some very sound advice.

When Jimmy returned to the office of Regal Pictures, Mr. Etzberg received him with a smile which would have done credit to a nurse. And having examined the two scripts as if he didn't want to do so, glittered his diamond ring. "Seems no doubt but what you're the man we've all been looking for," said he, tilting himself back in his chair.

"None whatever," said Jimmy. "And there never was."

"Well, then, all we've got to do is to come right down to it. I want to get it all settled and out of the way, right now.

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Suppose we say seven thousand five hundred and call it a pleasant day? You couldn't ask more than that and be a gentleman."

"Betters could."

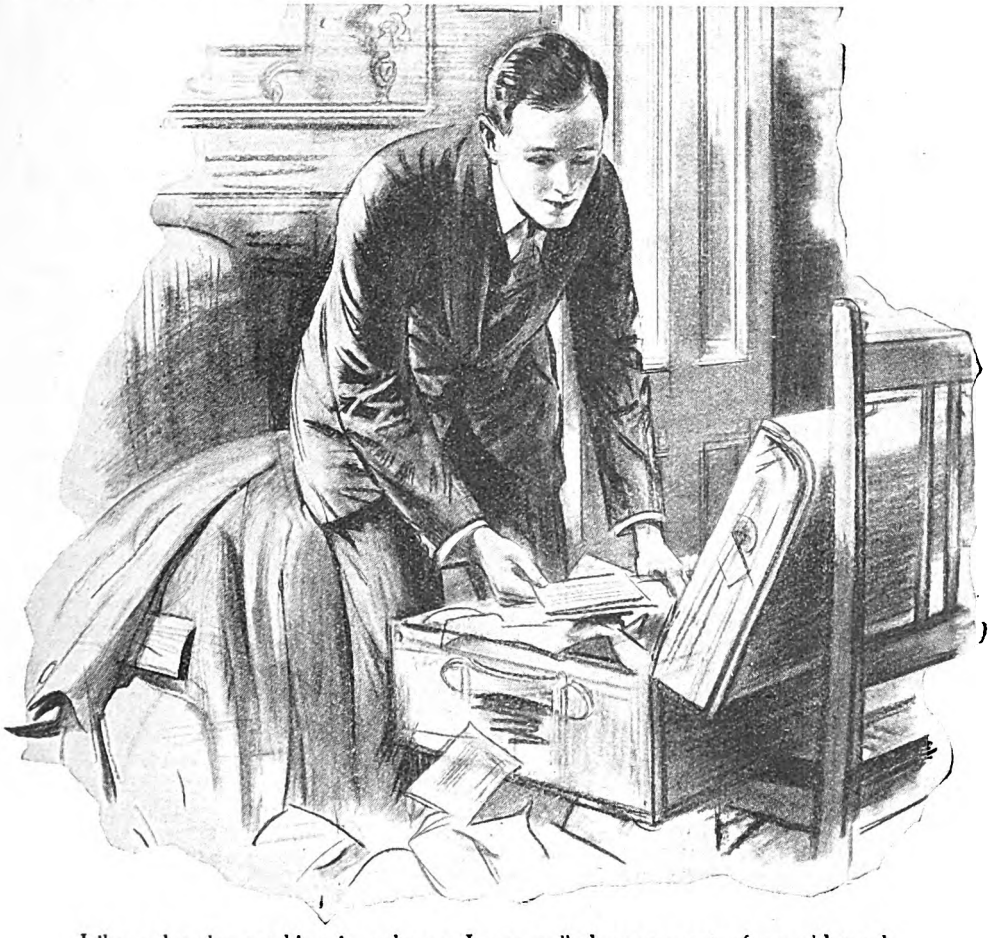
"Meaning?"

"That you were quite satisfied to pay him thirty thousand for my scenario when you thought that it was his."

price to an almost—pardon me—unknown writer?"

"No, and I never shall," said Jimmy, going strong. "That picture's making a fortune. Betters told me so."

Etzberg closed his eyes in an agony of shame. It wasn't decent to take any notice of a young man going mad.



Like a burglar working in a hurry, James pulled papers out of an old trunk and flung them all over the room.

"Thirty——? How do you know what we paid him?"

"He told me that just now."

Etzberg looked as though he had been kicked rather hard on the shin.

"And what I feel," said Jimmy, as firm as a two-days' loaf, "is that if you were willing to pay Betters that much you can pay the same to me."

"But, my dear Mr. Goodfellow," cried the president, "think of Betters's name! One of the very best! Can't you see, in fairness, that we can't afford to pay his

"My price for that job," said Jimmy, "is thirty thousand dollars. And what's more, by to-morrow my name as the author must be up in larger letters than you use to advertise Bortsch." He was on the box seat, and knew it. And Etzberg knew it too. "And there's another thing," he added, "which I will mention before I forget. Betters told me that you can make a front-page publicity story out of this affair that'll be worth twice as much to you as the sum I'm asking now. Big headlines. 'Struggling author has riches

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thrust upon him.' You know the sort of stuff."

Mr. Etzberg brightened. He saw the silver lining. "We might make something of it," he conceded. "But oh, Mr. Goodday, oh!"

Within an hour Jimmy collected that cheque for thirty thousand and signed the contract which Mr. Braham very gracefully drew up. Realizing thereupon that Jimmy's services would be competed for by rival firms as soon as the story in headlines appeared in the city's Press, Etzberg signed him up for three more stories and blotted his signature.

The president of Regal Pictures, Inc., was too long-headed a man of business to allow a favourite author to depart on anything but the very friendliest terms. He congratulated Jimmy warmly on both his commercial and literary ability, and after several hearty rounds of handshakes guided him with great reluctance to the door. And at this point Jimmy turned.

"What now?" Etzberg's eyes twinkled. "The contracts are signed and I've got my fingers crossed," he said, playfully.

"The girl who put Betters's name on my story. Can I speak to her?"

Mr. Etzberg looked embarrassed. "We fired her," he said.

"For making that mistake?"

"Well——" He wriggled his diamond ring.

"Hmmmm. What was her name?"

"Miss—Miss—let's see now. Baxter, I think it was."

"Where is she now, do you know?"

"No, I don't. But I'll get on to Information. They'll probably know there."

"Don't you bother," said Jimmy, placing a restraining hand on the presidential arm. "I'll ask as I go out."

"Eh? What's that?" Yes, the ravishing blonde knew where Kay Baxter could be reached. And she gave Jimmy the telephone number as well as the address. No, so far as she knew, Kay hadn't found herself another job. Jobs weren't so plentiful as people seemed to think. Righty—righty. Good-night.

TURNING over in her mind the nearer and nearer probability of having to give up her flat, Kay Baxter was jerked out of gloom by the ring of her telephone. Like the man who had acquired her number ten or so minutes ago, she had begun to think that luck had turned her down.

"Miss Baxter speaking — yes? Mr. Goodwin? Yes? A job? I've never wanted anything so badly in my life. Dictation and typing manuscripts? I was born for that—— Where did you get my name? Regal Pictures, eh? Well, that was pretty decent of 'em. When do you want me to start? What's that? Have dinner with you somewhere and talk it over there? That sounds fair enough. You'll call at seven-thirty? Right—— Oh, you needn't worry about that, sir. I sha'n't be too dressed up. So long, then. And thank *you*."

A sort of Indian war whoop startled the neighbourhood. With a gorgeous running dive at the bed the girl turned head over heels, landed on her feet, and made a series of excited grabs at undies, a frock, and shoes.

"If our Mr. Goodwin is as nice as he sounds," she said to herself in the bath-tub, "things have taken a turn."

Prompt to the dot of seven-thirty the door-bell rang. Kay hurried down to the hall. They couldn't make out more than a rough idea of each other in the dimness of the cab, but on entering the blaze of the restaurant Kay decided that her new employer, though not a sheik, was nice. Very, very nice. And had a mind-reader been present he would have been able to tell the world that Jimmy was not at that moment thinking about the way his companion typed. Steady grey eyes with absurdly long lashes. Chestnut hair that curled on its own account. An oval face. A straight little nose. Small teeth. And a mouth—however, he was hungry too.

And having been lonely so long, hanging on to the ragged edge, and because of the part she had played in it, what more natural than that he should tell her, during a wonderful dinner, of his astounding bit of luck? She proved her ability as a good secretary by the raptness of her attention and charming sympathy.

After dinner they danced. In short, they danced until it became almost unnatural to be out of each other's arms. During those necessary moments when the orchestra recovered itself, Kay accepted the proffered job and Jimmy announced his plans. He was all for a furnished flat in which there was room for his brain. He was not only seething with great ideas but there were piles of unsold stories which would come in useful now. They demanded considerable space.

And then they drove back to Kay's flat through a world that was flooded with light. It was cold, and perhaps for that reason they sat rather too close. It was a mutually kind idea. "What do you say," said Jimmy, "about an even larger flat?"

There was something in his voice that sent a thrill through Kay. You must remember that she was in the habit of typing scenarios. "Why?" she managed to ask.

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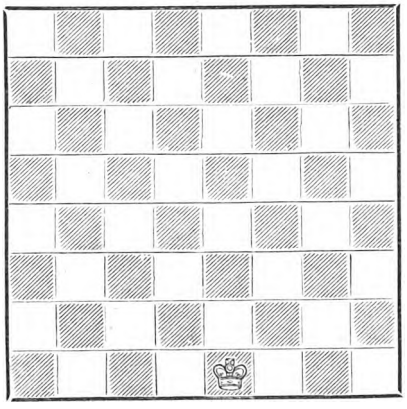
PERPLEXITIES.

By HENRY E. DUDENEY.

923.—THE KING'S MARCH.

If I asked the reader in how many different ways this King can march to his eighth square at the other end of the column in seven moves the answer, 393 ways, would be found very easy to discover. But if



the King is required to make eight moves to get to the same destination the question becomes more difficult. How many different ways are there in which he can make the march in eight moves?

924.—EXPRESSING 24.

I have just noticed in a book published in America the following:—

"Write 24 with three equal digits none of which is 8. (There are two solutions to this problem.)"

Of course the answers given are $22+2=24$ and $3^3-3=24$, while the excluded case was $8+8+8=24$. Readers who are familiar with the old "Four Fours" puzzle and others of the same class will, like myself, ask why there are supposed to be only these solutions. With which of the remaining digits is a solution equally possible?

925.—A NEW MAGIC SQUARE.

In this square, as every cell contains the same number—1 2 3 4—the three columns, three rows, and two long diagonals naturally add up alike. The puzzle

1234	1234	1234
1234	1234	1234
1234	1234	1234

is to form and place nine different four-figure numbers (using the same figures) so that they also shall form a perfect magic square. Remember that the numbers together must contain nine of each figure 1, 2, 3, 4, and that they must be four-figure numbers without fractions or trick of any kind.

926.—HIDDEN QUOTATION.

Here is an absurd sentence: OH IT CAN RATHER CHILL THY TOE. But if you change one letter in every word (without changing the order of the remaining letters) and then put the new words in a different order, you will get a quotation from one of our English poets that is so familiar that it has practically come to be regarded as a proverb. What is the corrected sentence?

927.—THE EGG CABINET.

A correspondent (T. S.) informs me that a man has a cabinet for holding birds' eggs. There are twelve drawers, and all except the first drawer, which only holds the catalogue, are divided into cells by intersecting wooden strips, each running the entire width or length of the drawer. The number of cells in any drawer is greater than that of the drawer above. The bottom drawer, No. 12, has twelve times as many cells as strips, No. 11 has eleven times as many cells as strips, and so on. Can you show how the drawers were divided—how many cells and strips in each drawer? Give the smallest possible number in each case.

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

919.—THE TWENTY-TWO BRIDGES.

It will be found that every department has an even number (2, 4, or 6) of bridges leading from it except C and L, which can only be approached each by three bridges—an odd number. Therefore to go over every bridge once and only once it is necessary to begin and end at C and L, which are the two departments in which the houses stand. Thus, starting from C, we may take the following route: C, G, F, C, B, A, D, H, E, I, H, J, K, L, M, G, I, F, B, E, F, I, L.

920.—A SOLITAIRE PUZZLE.

With the counter removed from No. 2 the last counter must be left in either 2, 14, 17, 20, or 32 hole, and the following moves solve the puzzle for the first case as required: 10–2, 8–10, 1–9, 16–4, 3–1–9, 28–16, 21–23, 16–28, 10–8–22, 7–21–23, 12–10, 25–11, 27–25, 24–26, 13–27–25, 32–24–22, 31–23, 22–24–26, 33–25, 26–24, 6–18, 17–5, 19–17, 24–10–2.

921.—FINDING A BIRTHDAY.

The man must have been born at midday on 19th February, 1873, and at midday on 11th November, 1928, he will have lived 10,1761/4 days in each century. Of course the century ended at midnight on 31st December, 1900, which was not a leap year, and his age will be 55 years and nearly 9 months.

922.—THE FIVE VOWELS.

A series of five-letter words can at once be obtained by adding "s" to the four-letter examples I gave, making mates, metes, mites, motes, mutes. My six-letter series is racked, recked, ricked, rocked, rucked. But the best answer I know, sent to me by J. M. P., is a seven-letter series: Patting, petting, pitting, potting, putting. He seems to have overlooked that we can get an eight-letter series by adding an "s" to every one of these words. I do not think it probable that this can be beaten.

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The STRAND MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1928.

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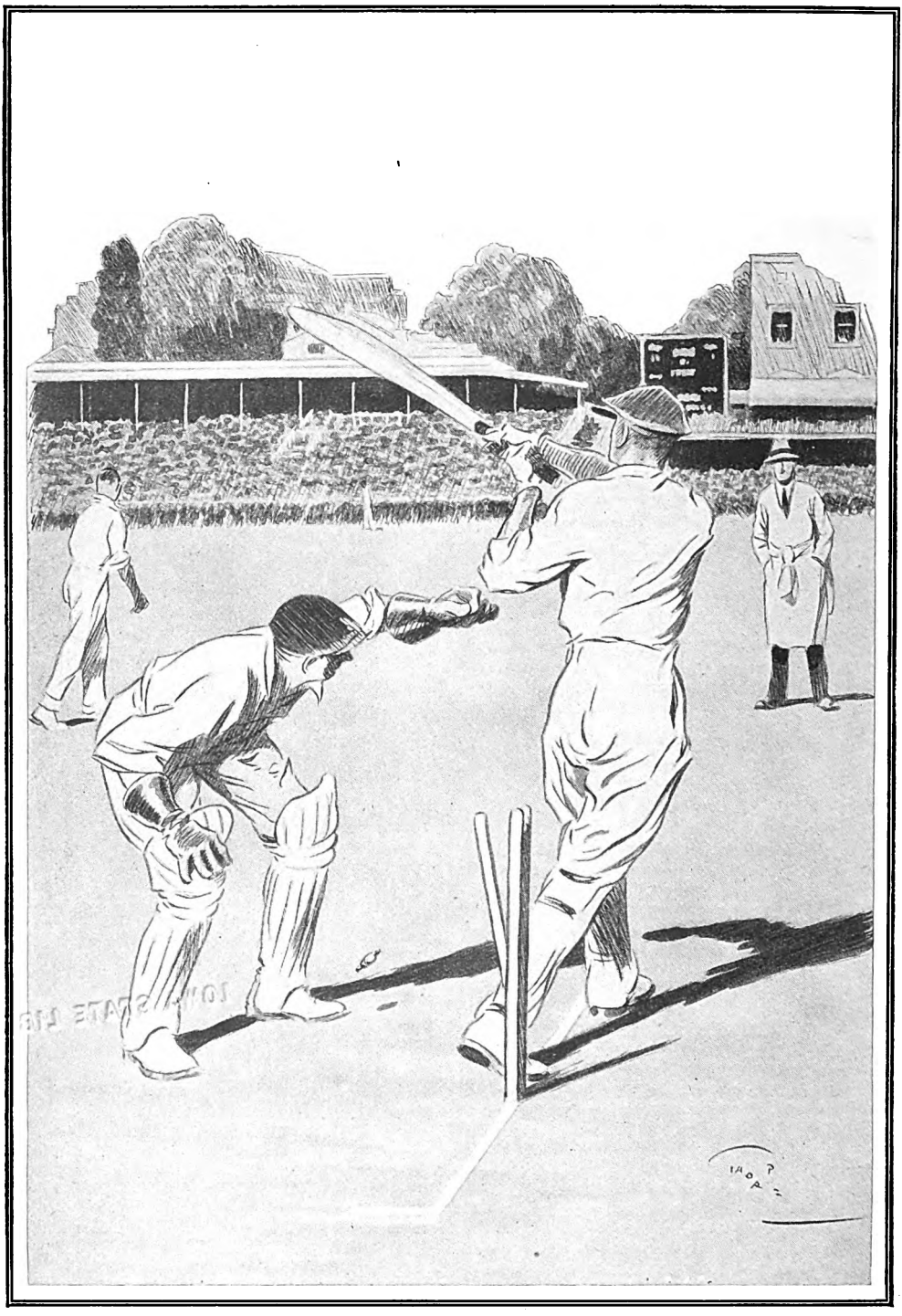

FORGETFUL OF HIS POSITION AND WITH ALL HIS THOUGHTS UPON THIS EXTRAORDINARY BALL WHICH WAS SOARING OVER HIS HEAD, THE GREAT BATSMAN HAD TOUCHED THE WICKET WITH HIS TOE.

(See page 323.)

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The Story of Spedegue's Dropper

By

A. CONAN DOYLE

Illustrated by
J. H. THORPE

THE name of Walter Scougall needs no introduction to the cricketing public. In the 'nineties he played for his University. Early in the century he began that long career in the county team which carried him up to the War. That great tragedy broke his heart for games, but he still served on his county Club Committee and was reckoned one of the best judges of the game in the United Kingdom.

Scougall, after his abandonment of active sport, was wont to take his exercise by long walks through the New Forest, upon the borders of which he was living. Like all wise men, he walked very silently through that wonderful waste, and in that way he was often privileged to see sights which are lost to the average heavy-stepping wayfarer. Once, late in the evening, it was a badger blundering towards its hole under a hollow bank. Often a little group of deer would be glimpsed in the open rides. Occasionally a fox would steal across the path and then dart off at the sight of the noiseless wayfarer. Then one day he saw a human sight which was more strange than any in the animal world.

In a narrow glade there stood two great oaks. They were thirty or forty feet apart, and the glade was spanned by a cord which connected them up. This cord was at least fifty feet above the ground, and it must have entailed no small effort to get it there. At each side of the cord a cricket stump had been placed at the usual distance from each other. A tall, thin young man in spectacles was lobbing balls, of which he seemed to have a good supply, from one end, while at the other end a lad of sixteen, wearing wicket-keeper's gloves, was catching those which missed the wicket. " Catching " is the right word, for no ball struck the ground. Each was projected high up into the air and passed over the cord, descending at a very sharp angle on to the stumps.

Scougall stood for some minutes behind a holly bush watching this curious performance. At first it seemed pure lunacy, and then gradually he began to perceive a method in it. It was no easy matter to hurl a ball up over that cord and bring it down near the wicket. It needed a very correct trajectory. And yet this singular young man, using what the observer's practised eye recognized as a leg-break action which would entail a swerve in the air, lobbed up ball after ball either right on to the bails or into the wicket-keeper's hands just beyond them. Great practice was surely needed before he had attained such a degree of accuracy as this.

Finally his curiosity became so great that Scougall moved out into the glade, to the obvious surprise and embarrassment of the two performers. Had they been caught in some guilty action they could not have looked more unhappy. However, Scougall was a man of the world with a pleasant manner, and he soon put them at their ease.

" Excuse my butting in," said he. " I happened to be passing and I could not help being interested. I am an old cricketer, you see, and it appealed to me. Might I ask what you were trying to do ? "

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"Oh, I am just tossing up a few balls," said the elder, modestly. "You see, there is no decent ground about here, so my brother and I come out into the Forest."

"Are you a bowler, then?"

"Well, of sorts."

"What club do you play for?"

"It is only Wednesday and Saturday cricket. Bishops Bramley is our village."

"But do you always bowl like that?"

"Oh, no. This is a new idea that I have been trying out."

"Well, you seem to get it pretty accurately."

"I am improving. I was all over the place at first. I didn't know what parish they would drop in. But now they are usually there or about it."

"So I observe."

"You said you were an old cricketer. May I ask your name?"

"Walter Scougall."

The young man looked at him as a young pupil looks at the world-famed master.

"You remember the name, I see."

"Walter Scougall. Oxford and Hampshire. Last played in 1913. Batting average for that season, twenty-seven point five. Bowling average, sixteen for seventy-two wickets."

"Good Lord!"

The younger man, who had come across, burst out laughing.

"Tom is like that," said he. "He is Wisden and Lillywhite rolled into one. He could tell you anyone's record, and every county's record for this century."

"Well, well! What a memory you must have!"

"Well, my heart is in the game," said the young man, becoming amazingly confidential, as shy men will when they find a really sympathetic listener. "But it's my heart that won't let me play it as I should wish to do. You see, I get asthma if I do too much—and palpitations. But they play me at Bishops Bramley for my slow bowling, and so long as I field slip I don't have too much running to do."

"You say you have not tried these lobs, or whatever you may call them, in a match?"

"No, not yet. I want to get them perfect first. You see, it was my ambition to invent an entirely new ball. I am sure it can be done. Look at Bosanquet and the googlie. Just by using his brain he thought of and worked out the idea of concealed screw on the ball. I said to myself that Nature had handicapped me with a weak heart, but not with a weak brain, and that I might think out some new thing which was within the compass of my strength. Droppers, I call them. Spedegue's droppers—that's the name they may have some day."

Scougall laughed. "I don't want to discourage you, but I wouldn't bank on it too much," said he. "A quick-eyed batsman would simply treat them as he would any other full toss and every ball would be a boundary."

Spedegue's face fell. The words of Scougall were to him as the verdict of the High Court judge. Never had he spoken before with a first-class cricketer, and he had hardly the nerve to defend his own theory. It was the younger one who spoke.

"Perhaps, Mr. Scougall, you have hardly thought it all out yet," said he. "Tom has given it a lot of consideration. You see, if the ball is tossed high enough it has a great pace as it falls. It's really like having a fast bowler from above. That's his idea. Then, of course, there is the field."

"Ah, how would you place your field?"

"All on the on side bar one or two at the most," cried Tom Spedegue, taking up the argument. "I've nine to dispose of. I should have mid-off well up. That's all. Then I should have eight men to leg, three on the boundary, one mid-on, two square, one fine, and one a rover, so that the batsman would never quite know where he was. That's the idea."

Scougall began to be serious. It was clear that this young fellow really had plotted the thing out. He walked across to the wicket.

"Chuck up one or two," said he. "Let me see how they look." He brandished his walking-stick and waited expectant. The ball soared in the air and came down with unexpected speed just over the stump. Scougall looked more serious still. He had seen many cricket balls, but never quite from that angle, and it gave him food for thought."

"Have you ever tried it in public?"

"Never."

"Don't you think it is about time?"

"Yes, I think I might."

"When?"

"Well, I'm not generally on as a first bowler. I am second change as a rule. But if the skipper will let me have a go——"

"I'll see to that," said Scougall. "Do you play at Bishops Bramley?"

"Yes; it is our match of the year—against Blackford, you know."

"Well, I think on Saturday I'd like to be there and see how it works."

SURE enough Scougall turned up at the village match, to the great excitement of the two rural teams. He had a serious talk with the home captain, with the result that for the first time in his life Tom Spedegue was first bowler for his native village. What the other village

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thought of his remarkable droppers need not influence us much, since they would probably have been got out pretty cheaply by any sort of bowling. None the less, Scougall watched the procession to and from the cow-shed which served as a pavilion with an appreciative eye, and his views as to the possibilities lying in the dropper became clearer than before. At the end of the innings he touched the bowler upon the shoulder.

"That seems all right," he said.

"No, I couldn't quite get the length—and, of course, they did drop catches."

"Yes, I agree that you could do better. Now look here; you are second master at a school, are you not?"

"That is right."

"You could get a day's leave if I wangled with the chief?"

"It might be done."

"Well, I want you next Tuesday. Sir George Sanderson's house-party team is playing the Free Foresters at Ringwood. You must bowl for Sir George."

Tom Spedegue flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, I say!" was all he could stammer out.

"I'll work it somehow or other. I suppose you don't bat?"

"Average nine," said Spedegue, proudly.

Scougall laughed. "Well, I noticed that you were not a bad fielder near the wicket."

"I usually hold them."

"Well, I'll see your boss and you will hear from me again."

Scougall was really taking a great deal of trouble in this small affair, for he went down to Totton and saw the rather grim head master. It chanced, however, that the old man had been a bit of a sport in his day, and he relaxed when Scougall explained the inner meaning of it all. He laughed incredulously, however, and shook his head when Scougall whispered some aspiration.

"Nonsense!" was his comment.

"Well, there is a chance."

"Nonsense!" said the old man once again.

"It would be the making of your school."

"It certainly would," the head master replied. "But it is nonsense all the same."

Scougall saw the head master again on the morning after the Free Forester match.

"You see it works all right," he said.

"Yes, against third-class men."

"Oh, I don't know. Donaldson was playing, and Murphy. They were not so bad. I tell you they are the most amazed set of men in Hampshire. I have bound them all over to silence."

"Why?"

"Surprise is the essence of the matter. Now I'll take it a stage farther. By Jove, what a joke it would be!" The old cricketer and the sporting schoolmaster roared with laughter as they thought of the chances of the future.

ALL England was absorbed in one question at that moment. Politics, business, even taxation had passed from people's minds. The one engrossing subject was the fifth Test Match. Twice England had won by a narrow margin, and twice Australia had barely struggled to victory. Now in a week Lord's was to be the scene of the final and crucial battle of giants. What were the chances, and how was the English team to be made up?

It was an anxious time for the Selection Committee, and three more harassed men than Sir James Gilpin, Mr. Tarding, and Dr. Sloper were not to be found in London. They sat now in the committee-room of the great pavilion, and they moodily scanned the long list of possibles which lay before them, weighing the claims of this man or that, closely inspecting the latest returns from the county matches, and arguing how far a good all-rounder was a better bargain than a man who was supremely good in one department but weak in another—such men, for example, as Worsley of Lancashire, whose average was seventy-one, but who was a sluggard in the field; or Scott of Leicestershire, who was near the top of the bowling and quite at the foot of the batting averages. A week of such work had turned the committee into three jaded old men.

"There is the question of endurance," said Sir James, the man of many years and much experience. "A three days' match is bad enough, but this is to be played out and may last a week. Some of these top average men are getting on in years."

"Exactly," said Tarding, who had himself captained England again and again. "I am all for young blood and new methods. The trouble is that we know their bowling pretty well, and as for them on a marled wicket they can play ours with their eyes shut. Each side is likely to make five hundred per innings, and a very little will make the difference between us and them."

"It's just that very little that we have got to find," said solemn old Dr. Sloper, who had the reputation of being the greatest living authority upon the game. "If we could give them something new! But, of course, they have played every county and sampled everything we have got."

"What can we ever have that is new?" cried Tarding. "It is all played out."

"Well, I don't know," said Sir James. "Both the swerve and the googlie have

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come along in our time. But Bosanquets don't appear every day. We want brain as well as muscle behind the ball."

"Funny we should talk like this," said Dr. Sloper, taking a letter from his pocket. "This is from old Scougall, down in Hampshire. He says he is at the end of a wire and is ready to come up if we want him. His whole argument is on the very lines we have been discussing. New blood, and a complete surprise—that is his slogan."

"Does he suggest where we are to find it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact he does. He has dug up some unknown fellow from the back of beyond who plays for the second eleven of the Mudtown Blackbeetles or the Hinton Chawbacons or some such team, and he wants to put him straight in to play for England. Poor old Scougie has been out in the sun."

"At the same time there is no better captain than Scougall used to be. I don't think we should put his opinion aside too easily. What does he say?"

"Well, he is simply red-hot about it. 'A revelation to me.' That is one phrase. 'Could not have believed it if I had not seen it.' 'May find it out afterwards, but it is bound to upset them the first time.' That is his view."

"And where is this wonder man?"

"He has sent him up so that we can see him if we wish. Telephone the Thackeray Hotel, Bloomsbury."

"Well, what do you say?"

"Oh, it's pure waste of time," said Tarding. "Such things don't happen, you know. Even if we approved of him, what would the country think and what would the Press say?"

Sir James stuck out his grizzled jaw.

"Damn the country and the Press, too!" said he. "We are here to follow our own judgment, and I jolly well mean to do so."

"Exactly," said Dr. Sloper.

Tarding shrugged his broad shoulders.

"We have enough to do without turning down a side-street like that," said he. "However, if you both think so, I won't stand in the way. Have him up by all means and let us see what we make of him."

HALF an hour later a very embarrassed young man was standing in front of the famous trio and listening to a series of very searching questions, to which he was giving such replies as he was able. Much of the ground which Scougall had covered in the Forest was explored by them once more.

"It boils down to this, Mr. Spedegue. You've once in your life played in good company. That is the only criterion. What exactly did you do?"

Spedegue pulled a slip of paper, which was already frayed from much use, out of his waistcoat pocket.

"This is *The Hampshire Telegraph* account, sir."

Sir James ran his eye over it and read snatches aloud. "Much amusement was caused by the bowling of Mr. T. E. Spedegue." "Hum! That's rather two-edged. Bowling should not be a comic turn. After all, cricket is a serious game. Seven wickets for thirty-four. Well, that's better. Donaldson is a good man. You got him, I see. And Murphy, too! Well, now, would you mind going into the pavilion and waiting? You will find some pictures there that will amuse you if you value the history of the game. We'll send for you presently."

When the youth had gone the Selection Committee looked at each other in puzzled silence.

"You simply can't do it!" said Tarding at last. "You can't face it. To play a bumpkin like that because he once got seven wickets for thirty-four in country-house cricket is sheer madness. I won't be a party to it."

"Wait a bit, though! Wait a bit!" cried Sir James. "Let us thresh it out a little before we decide."

So they threshed it out, and in half an hour they sent for Tom Spedegue once more. Sir James sat with his elbows on the table and his finger-tips touching while he held forth in his best judicial manner. His conclusion was a remarkable one.

"So it comes to this, Mr. Spedegue, that we all three want to be on surer ground before we take a step which would rightly expose us to the most tremendous public criticism. You will therefore remain in London, and at three-forty-five to-morrow morning, which is just after dawn, you will come down in your flannels to the side entrance of Lord's. We will, under pledge of secrecy, assemble twelve or thirteen ground-men whom we can trust, including half-a-dozen first-class bats. We will have a wicket prepared on the practice ground, and we will try you out under proper conditions with your ten fielders and all. If you fail, there is an end. If you make good, we may consider your claim."

"Good gracious, sir, I made no claim."

"Well, your friend Scougall did for you. But anyhow, that's how we have fixed it. We shall be there, of course, and a few others whose opinion we can trust. If you care to wire Scougall he can come too. But the whole thing is secret, for we quite see the point that it must be a complete surprise or a wash-out. So you will keep your mouth shut and we shall do the same."

Thus it came about that one of the most

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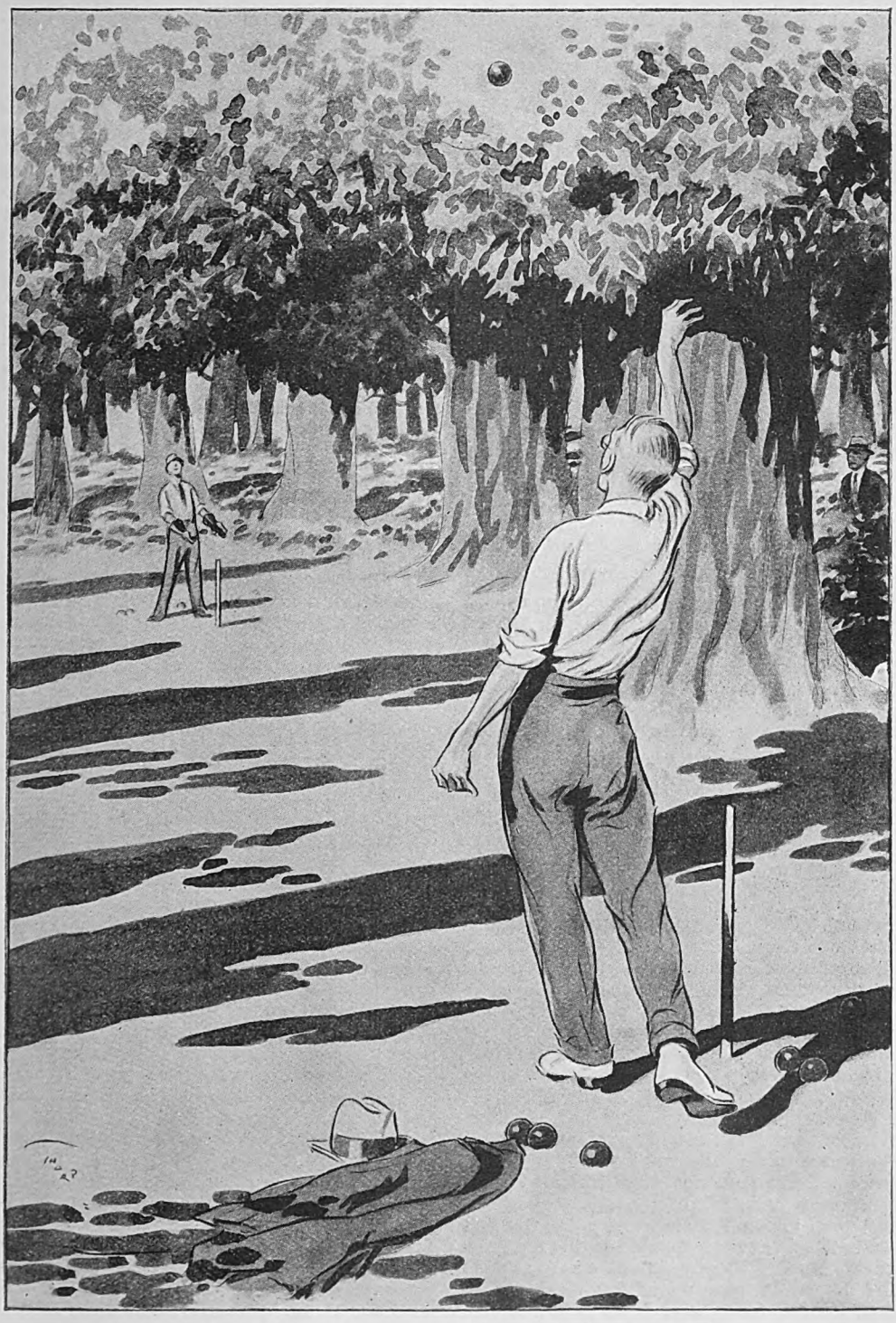

A tall, thin young man was lobbing balls from one end.

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curious games in the history of cricket was played on the Lord's ground next morning. There is a high wall round that part, but early wayfarers as they passed were amazed to hear the voices of the players, and the occasional crack of the ball at such an hour. The superstitious might almost have imagined that the spirits of the great departed were once again at work, and that the adventurous explorer might get a peep at the bushy black beard of the old giant or Billie Murdoch leading his Cornstalks once more to victory. At six o'clock the impromptu match was over, and the Selection Committee had taken the bravest and most sensational decision that had ever been hazarded since first a team was chosen. Tom Spedegue should play next week for England.

"Mind you," said Tarding, "if the beggar lets us down I simply won't face the music. I warn you of that. I'll have a taxi waiting at the gate and a passport in my pocket. Poste restante, Paris. That's me for the rest of the summer."

"Cheer up, old chap," said Sir James. "Our conscience is clear. We have acted for the best. Dash it all, we have ten good men, anyhow. If the worst came to the worst it only means one passenger in the team."

"But it won't come to the worst," said Dr. Sloper, stoutly. "Hang it, we have seen with our own eyes. What more can we do? All the same, for the first time in my life I'll have a whisky-and-soda before breakfast."

NEXT day the list was published and the buzz began. Ten of the men might have been expected. These were Challen and Jones, as fast bowlers, and Widley, the slow left-hander. Then Peters, Moir, Jackson, Wilson, and Grieve were at the head of the batting averages, none of them under fifty, which was pretty good near the close of a wet season. Hanwell and Gordon were two all-rounders who were always sure of their places, dangerous bats, good change bowlers, and as active as cats in the field. So far so good. But who the Evil One was Thomas E. Spedegue? Never was there such a ferment in Fleet Street and such blank ignorance upon the part of "our well-informed correspondent." Special Commissioners darted here and there, questioning well-known cricketers, only to find that they were as much in the dark as themselves. Nobody knew—or if anyone did know, he was bound by oath not to tell. The wildest tales flew abroad. "We are able to assure the public that Spedegue is a 'nom de jeu' and conceals the identity of a world-famed cricketer who for family reasons is not permitted to reveal his true self." "Thomas E. Spedegue will surprise the crowd at Lord's by appearing as a coal-black gentleman from Jamaica. He came over with the last West Indian team, settled in Derbyshire, and is now eligible to play for England, though why he should be asked to do so is still a mystery." "Spedegue, as is now generally known, is a half-caste Malay who exhibited extraordinary cricket proficiency some years ago in Rangoon. It is said that he plays in a loin-cloth and can catch as well with his feet as with his hands. The question of whether he is qualified for England is a most debatable one." "Spedegue, Thomas E., is the headmaster of a famous northern school whose wonderful talents in the cricket field have been concealed by his devotion to his academic duties. Those who know him best are assured," etc., etc. The Committee also began to get it in the neck. "Why, with the wealth of talent available, these three elderly gentlemen, whose ideas of selection seem to be to pick names out of a bag, should choose one who, whatever his hidden virtues, is certainly unused to first-class cricket, far less to Test Matches, is one of those things which make one realize that the lunacy laws are not sufficiently comprehensive." These were fair samples of the comments.

And then the inevitable came to pass. When Fleet Street is out for something it invariably gets it. No one quite knows how *The Daily Sportsman* succeeded in getting at Thomas Spedegue, but it was a great scoop and the incredible secret was revealed. There was a leader and there was an interview with the village patriarch which set London roaring with laughter. "No, we ain't surprised nohow," said Gaffer Hobbs. "Maister Spedegue do be turble clever with them slow balls of his'n. He sure was too much for them chaps what came in the char-à-bancs from Mudford. Artful, I call 'im. You'll see." The leader was scathing. "The Committee certainly seem to have taken leave of their senses. Perhaps there is time even now to alter their absurd decision. It is almost an insult to our Australian visitors. It is obvious that the true place for Mr. Thomas Spedegue, however artful he may be, is the village green and not Lord's, and that his competence to deal with the char-à-bancers of Mudford is a small guarantee that he can play first-class cricket. The whole thing is a deplorable mistake, and it is time that pressure was put upon the Selection Board to make them reconsider their decision."

"We have examined the score-book of the Bishops Bramley village club," wrote

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another critic. "It is kept in the tap-room of The Spotted Cow, and makes amusing reading. Our Test Match aspirant is hard to trace, as he played usually for the second eleven, and in any case there was no one capable of keeping an analysis. However, we must take such comfort as we can from his batting averages. This year he has actually amassed a hundred runs in nine recorded innings. Best in an innings, fifteen. Average, eleven. Last year he was less fortunate and came out with an average of nine. The youth is second master at the Totton High School and is in indifferent health, suffering from occasional attacks of asthma. And he is chosen to play for England! Is it a joke or what? We think that the public will hardly see the humour of it, nor will the Selection Committee find it a laughing matter if they persist in their preposterous action." So spoke the Press, but there were, it is only fair to say, other journals which took a more charitable view. "After all," said the sporting correspondent of *The Times*, "Sir James and his two colleagues are old and experienced players with a unique knowledge of the game. Since we have placed our affairs in their hands we must be content to leave them there. They have their own knowledge and their own private information of which we are ignorant. We can but trust them and await the event."

A very embarrassed young man was standing in front of the Selection Committee.

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As to the three, they refused in any way to compromise or to bend to the storm. They gave no explanations, made no excuses, and simply dug in and lay quiet. So the world waited till the day came round.

We all remember what glorious weather it was. The heat and the perfect Bulli-earth wicket, so far as England could supply that commodity, reminded our visitors of their native conditions. It was England, however, who got the best of that ironed shirt-front wicket, for in their first knock even Cotsmore, the Australian giant, who was said to be faster than Gregory and more wily than Spofforth, could seldom get the ball bail-high. He bowled with splendid vim and courage, but his analysis at the end of the day only showed three wickets for a hundred and forty-two. Storr, the googlie merchant, had a better showing with four for ninety-six. Cade's mediums accounted for two wickets, and Moir, the English captain, was run out. He had made seventy-three first, and Peters, Grieve, and Hanwell raked up sixty-four, fifty-seven, and fifty-one respectively, while nearly everyone was in double figures. The only exception was "Thomas E. Spedegue, Esq.," to quote the score card, which recorded a blank after his name. He was caught in the slips off the fast bowler, and, as he admitted afterwards that he had never for an instant seen the ball, and could hardly in his nervousness see the bowler, it is remarkable that his wicket was intact. The English total was four hundred and thirty-two, and the making of it consumed the whole of the first day. It was fast scoring in the time, and the crowd were fully satisfied with the result.

AND now came the turn of Australia. An hour before play began forty thousand people had assembled, and by the time that the umpires came out the gates had to be closed, for there was not standing room within those classic precincts. Then came the English team, strolling out to the wickets and tossing the ball from hand to hand in time-honoured fashion. Finally appeared the two batsmen, Morland, the famous Victorian, the man of the quick feet and the supple wrists, whom many looked upon as the premier batsman of the world, and the stonewaller, Donahue, who had broken the hearts of so many bowlers with his obdurate defence. It was he who took the first over, which was delivered by Challen of Yorkshire, the raging, tearing fast bowler of the North. He sent down six beauties, but each of them came back to him down the pitch from that impenetrable half-cock shot which was characteristic of the famous Queenslander. It was a maiden over.

And now Moir tossed the ball to Spedegue and motioned him to begin at the pavilion end. The English captain had been present at the surreptitious trial and he had an idea of the general programme, but it took him some time and some consultation with the nervous, twitching bowler before he could set the field. When it was finally arranged the huge audience gasped with surprise and the batsmen gazed round them as if they could hardly believe their eyes. One poor little figure, alone upon a prairie, broke the solitude of the off-side. He stood as a deep point or as a silly mid-off. The on-side looked like a mass meeting. The fielders were in each other's way, and kept shuffling about to open up separate lines. It took some time to arrange, while Spedegue stood at the crease with a nervous smile, fingering the ball and waiting for orders. The Selection Board were grouped in the open window of the committee-room, and their faces were drawn and haggard.

"My God! This is awful!" muttered Tarding.

"Got that cab?" asked Dr. Sloper, with a ghastly smile.

"Got it! It is my one stand-by."

"Room for three in it?" said Sir James. "Gracious, he has got five short-legs and no slip. Well, well, get to it! Anything is better than waiting."

There was a deadly hush as Spedegue delivered his first ball. It was an ordinary slow full pitch straight on the wicket. At any other time Morland would have slammed it to the boundary, but he was puzzled and cautious after all this mysterious setting of the field. Some unknown trap seemed to have been set for him. Therefore he played the ball quietly back to the bowler and set himself for the next one, which was similar and treated in the same way.

Spedegue had lost his nerve. He simply could not, before this vast multitude of critics, send up the grotesque ball which he had invented. Therefore he compromised, which was the most fatal of all courses. He lobbed up balls which were high but not high enough. They were simply ordinary over-pitched, full-toss deliveries such as a batsman sees when he has happy dreams and smiles in his sleep. Such was the third ball, which was a little to the off. Morland sent it like a bullet past the head of the lonely mid-off and it crashed against the distant rails. The three men in the window looked at each other and the sweat was on their brows. The next ball was again a juicy full toss on the level of the batsman's ribs. He banged it through the crowd of fielders on the on with a deft turn of the wrist which insured that it should be upon the ground. Then, gaining confidence, he waited for the next of

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those wonderful dream balls, and steadying himself for a mighty fast-footed swipe he knocked it clean over the ring and on to the roof of the hotel to square-leg. There were roars of applause, for a British crowd loves a lofty hit, whoever may deliver it. The score-board marked fourteen made off five balls. Such an opening to a Test Match had never been seen.

"We thought he might break a record, and by Jove he has!" said Tarding, bitterly. Sir James chewed his ragged moustache and Sloper twisted his fingers together in agony. Moir, who was fielding at mid-on, stepped across to the unhappy bowler.

"Chuck 'em up, as you did on Tuesday morning. Buck up, man! Don't funk it! You'll do them yet."

Spedegue grasped the ball convulsively and nerved himself to send it high into the air. For a moment he pictured the New Forest glade, the white line of cord, and his young brother waiting behind the stump. But his nerve was gone, and with it his accuracy. There were roars of laughter as the ball went fifty feet into the air, which were redoubled when the wicket-keeper had to sprint back in order to catch it and the umpire stretched his arms out to signal a wide.

FOR the last ball, as he realized, that he was likely to bowl in the match, Spedegue approached the crease. The field was swimming round him. That yell of laughter which had greeted his effort had been the last straw. His nerve was broken. But there was a point where pure despair and desperation come to a man's aid—when he says to himself, "Nothing matters now. All is lost. It can't be worse than it is. Therefore I may as well let myself go." Never in all his practice had he bowled a ball as high as the one which now, to the amused delight of the crowd, went soaring into the air. Up it went and up—the most absurd ball ever delivered in a cricket match. The umpire broke down and shrieked with laughter, while even the amazed fielders joined in the general yell. The ball, after its huge parabola, descended well over the wicket, but as it was still within reach Morland, with a broad grin on his sunburned face, turned round and tapped it past the wicket-keeper's ear to the boundary. Spedegue's face drooped towards the ground. The bitterness of death was on him. It was all over. He had let down the Committee, he had let down the side, he had let down England. He wished the ground would open and swallow him so that his only memorial should be a scar upon the pitch of Lord's.

And then suddenly the derisive laughter of the crowd was stilled, for it was seen that an incredible thing had happened. Morland was walking towards the pavilion. As he passed Spedegue he made a good-humoured flourish of his bat as if he would hit him over the head with it. At the same time the wicket-keeper stooped and picked something off the ground. It was a bail. Forgetful of his position and with all his thoughts upon this extraordinary ball which was soaring over his head, the great batsman had touched the wicket with his toe. Spedegue had a respite. The laughter was changing to applause. Moir came over and clapped him jovially upon the back. The scoring board showed total fifteen, last man fourteen, wickets one.

Challen sent down another over of fizzers to the impenetrable Donahue which resulted in a snick for two and a boundary off his legs. And then off the last ball a miracle occurred. Spedegue was fielding at fine slip, when he saw a red flash come towards him low on the right. He thrust out a clutching hand and there was the beautiful new ball right in the middle of his tingling palm. How it got there he had no idea, but what odds so long as the stonewaller would stonewall no more? Spedegue, from being the butt, was becoming the hero of the crowd. They cheered rapturously when he approached the crease for his second over. The board was twenty-one, six, two.

But now it was a very different Spedegue. His fears had fallen from him. His confidence had returned. If he did nothing more he had at least done his share. But he would do much more. It had all come back to him, his sense of distance, his delicacy of delivery, his appreciation of curves. He had found his length and he meant to keep it.

The splendid Australian batsmen, those active, clear-eyed men who could smile at our fast bowling and make the best of our slow bowlers seem simple, were absolutely at sea. Here was something of which they had never heard, for which they had never prepared, and which was unlike anything in the history of cricket. Spedegue had got his fifty-foot trajectory to a nicety, bowling over the wicket with a marked curve from the leg. Every ball fell on or near the top of the stumps. He was as accurate as a human howitzer pitching shells. Batten, who followed Morland, hit across one of them and was clean bowled. Staker tried to cut one off his wicket, and knocked down his own off-stump, broke his bat, and finally saw the ball descend amid the general *débris*. Here and there one was turned to leg and once a short one was hit out of the ground. The fast bowler sent the fifth batsman's leg-stump flying and the score was five for thirty-seven. Then in successive balls Spedegue got Bollard and

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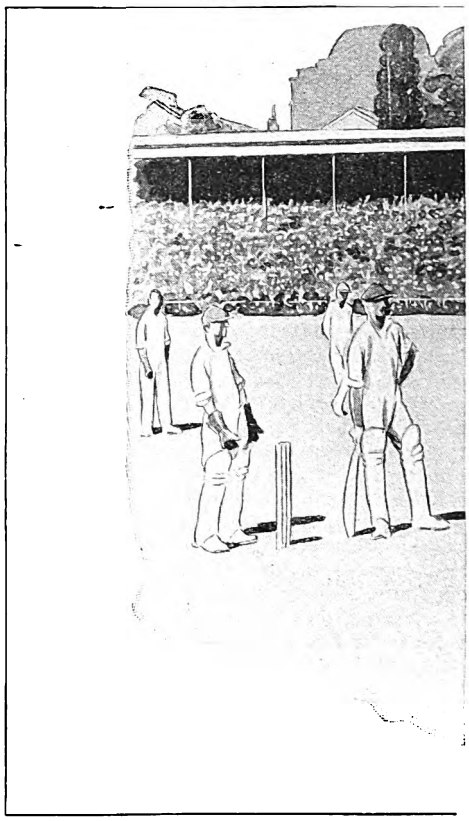
Whitelaw, the one caught at the wicket and the other at short square-leg. There was a stand between Moon and Carter, who put on twenty runs between them with a succession of narrow escapes from the droppers. Then each of them became victims, one getting his body in front, and the other being splendidly caught by Hanwell on the ropes. The last man was run out and the innings closed for seventy-four.

The crowd had begun by cheering and laughing, but now they had got beyond it and sat in a sort of awed silence as people might who were contemplating a miracle. Half-way through the innings Tarding had leaned forward and had grasped the hand of each of his colleagues. Sir James leaned back in his deck-chair and lit a large cigar. Dr. Sloper mopped his brow with his famous red handkerchief. "It's all right, but, by George, I wouldn't go through it again!" he murmured. The effect upon the players themselves was curious. The English seemed apologetic, as though not sure themselves that such novel means could be justified. The Australians were dazed and a little resentful. "What price quoits?" said Batten, the captain, as he passed into the pavilion. Spedegue's figures were seven wickets for thirty-one.

And now the question rose whether the miracle would be repeated. Once more Donahue and Morland were at the wicket. As to the poor stonewaller, it was speedily apparent that he was helpless. How can you stonewall a ball which drops perpendicularly upon your bails? He held his bat flat before it as it fell in order to guard his wicket, and it simply popped up three feet into the air and was held by the wicket-keeper. One for nothing. Batten and Staker both hit lustily to leg and each was caught by the mass meeting who waited for them. Soon, however, it became apparent that the new attack was not invincible, and that a quick, adaptive batsman could find his own methods. Morland again and again brought off what is now called the back drive—a stroke unheard of before—when he turned and tapped the ball over the wicket-keeper's head to the boundary. Now that a crash helmet has been added to the stumper's equipment he is safer than he used to be, but Grieve has admitted that he was glad that he had a weekly paper with an insurance coupon in his cricket bag that day. A fielder was placed on the boundary in line with the stumps, and then the versatile Morland proceeded to elaborate those fine tips to slip and tips to fine leg which are admitted now to be the only proper treatment of the dropper. At the same time Whitelaw took a pace back so as to be level with his wicket and topped the droppers



down to the off so that Spedegue had to bring two of his legs across and so disarrange his whole plan of campaign. The pair put on ninety for the fifth wicket, and when Whitelaw at last got out, bowled by Hanwell, the score stood at one hundred and thirty.

But from then onwards the case was hopeless. It is all very well for a quick-eyed, active genius like Morland to adapt himself in a moment to a new game, but it is too much to ask of the average first-class cricketer, who, of all men, is most accustomed to routine methods. The slogging bumpkin from the village green would have made a better job of Spedegue than did these great cricketers, to whom the orthodox method was the only way. Every rule learned, every experience endured, had in a moment become useless. How could you play with a straight bat at a ball that fell from the clouds? They did their best—as well, probably, as the English team would have done in their place—but their best made a poor show upon a scoring card. Morland remained a great master to the end and carried out his bat for a superb seventy-seven. The second

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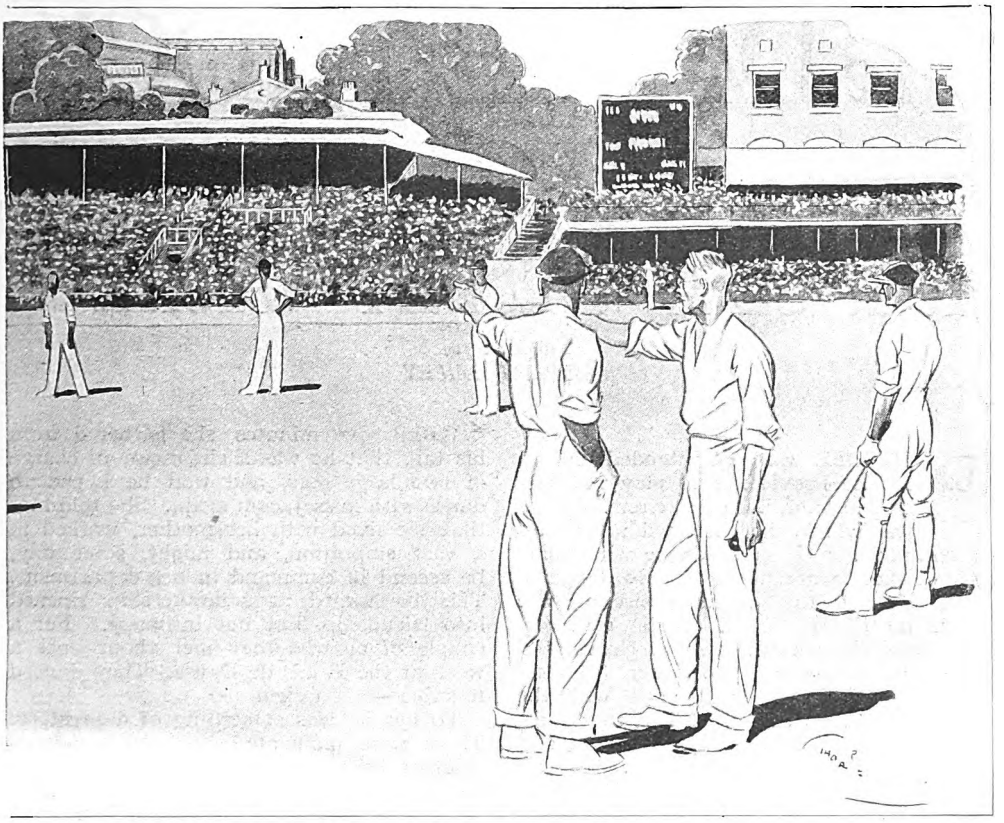

It took the English captain some time and consultation with the nervous, twitching bowler before he could set the field.

innings came to a close at six o'clock on the second day of the match, the score being one hundred and seventy-four. Spedegue eight for sixty-one. England had won by an innings and one hundred and eighty-four runs.

Well, it was a wonderful day and it came to a wonderful close. It is a matter of history how the crowd broke the ropes, how they flooded the field, and how Spedegue, protesting loudly, was carried shoulder-high into the pavilion. Then came the cheering and the speeches. The hero of the day had to appear again and again. When they were weary of cheering him they cheered for Bishops Bramley. Then the English captain had to make a speech. "Rather stand up to Cotsmore bowling on a ploughed field," said he. Then it was the turn of Batten the Australian. "You've beat us at something," he said ruefully; "don't quite know yet what it is. It's not what we call cricket down under." Then the Selection Board were called for and they had the heartiest and best deserved cheer of them all. Tarding told them about the waiting cab. "It's waiting yet," he said, "but I think I can now dismiss it."

Spedegue played no more cricket. His heart would not stand it. His doctor declared that this one match had been one too many and that he must stand out in the future. But for good or for bad—for bad, as many think—he has left his mark upon the game for ever. The English were more amused than exultant over their surprise victory. The Australian papers were at first inclined to be resentful, but then the absurdity that a man from the second eleven of an unknown club should win a Test Match began to soak into them, and finally Sydney and Melbourne had joined London in its appreciation of the greatest joke in the history of cricket.

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The DANCE FROCK

By

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Illustrated by
ALBERT BAILEY

I.

PRIMROSE was not intended by an all-wise Providence to play the part of wallflower, but often circumstances over which she exercised no control constrained her either to dance with some girl of her acquaintance or to languish upon one of the chairs encircling the Palais de Danse. Most of the girls she knew, assistants like herself in Kensington shops and emporia, had their "boys." Primrose refused to "walk out" with the young men who entreated her to do so. She gave herself no airs, being modest and sensible (as well as pretty), but she was aware that her mother, who had known happier days as the wife of a struggling general practitioner (now dead), had imposed standards to which the frock-coated gentlemen in her emporium did not quite attain. She danced with them joyously; intimacy went no farther.

She was playing wallflower when a man about thirty approached her. She noticed that he limped slightly and that his face was disfigured by a deep scar. To her surprise, he addressed her, very politely:—

"Would you think it an impertinence if an ex-soldier asked you to give him a dance?"

She hesitated, marked a faint, deprecating smile hovering about his firm lips, and stood up, accepting his invitation half-resentfully. Nevertheless, he danced so well, and their steps matched so perfectly, that within a minute she had forgiven him. As soon as the dance was over, he led her back to her seat, sat down beside her, and said, pleasantly:—

"If I had known any man in the room who could have introduced me to you, I should have asked him to do so. Now I must introduce myself. My name is Furley—Andrew Furley."

She replied, ingenuously:—

"My name is Primrose Jacom."

Within five minutes she gathered from his talk that he was a chauffeur, in charge of two large cars, and that he hoped to dance with Miss Jacom again. She told him that she lived with her mother, worked in a vast emporium, and might, some day, be second in command in her department. This haphazard acquaintanceship ripened into friendship, but not intimacy. For a couple of months they met about once a week at the Palais de Danse. They danced together—and talked.

To her he was something of a mystery. There were moments when she wondered whether he might be a "real" gentleman who had sustained losses. He had served in the Transport Service during the war; and he had driven his employer's cars thousands of miles in France, Italy, and elsewhere. He talked of his adventures and misadventures with beguiling fluency; he appeared to be fond of children and dogs; he was quite pleased when other men asked her to dance. Her Christian name provoked comment. He declared it to be descriptive; she was unmistakably a prim little rose. She wondered if he regarded her as too prim. Post-war girls were not prim. She was uneasily aware that primness was a disability, but not apparently in the eyes of Mr. Furley. Never once had he attempted familiarities. She thought: "He respects me; and I respect him." When they danced together he held her delicately; he encouraged her to talk about herself; he inspired confidence consistently sympathetic.

If he asked her to meet him outside the Palais de Danse, what would she reply? He called her Primrose, but she addressed him invariably as Mr. Furley.

II.

ONE morning, soon after he dropped the formal "Miss Jacom," she felt unhappy and ill at ease, perfunctory in service to customers, slightly impatient

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with the "rather-nicers," who fingered everything and bought nothing. Long ago she had purged her mind and soul of envy and jealousy. It was her business to sell exquisite garments which she could never hope to wear herself. Hitherto she had enjoyed selling them, and enjoyed, too, the small commission that accrued as a *præmium diligentiæ*.

Upon the previous night Mr. Furley had asked her to accompany him, as his dancing partner, to a ball in Chelsea, organized for charitable purposes.

She had accepted this invitation (which included supper) eagerly and perhaps too hastily. Mr. Furley had said, as if the matter was of no importance: "Wear your smartest frock." She hadn't a smart frock; she couldn't afford to buy one.

Presently a young lady with engaging manners came into her department and asked to see dance frocks. Primrose saw at a glance that this customer was not wearing "reach-me-downs." She said, sweetly: "Do be a darling and hunt me up a rag that I can wear without mortification. Perhaps you have some models fresh from Paris. I've never bought a frock off the peg, but I must buy one this morning. I can see how it looks on you. We are the same size, aren't we, and quite oddly alike." They were. It was humanly certain that what would suit Miss Jacom would suit the customer.

Within five minutes Primrose had arrayed herself in a "model" priced at fifteen guineas. The customer

"You look perfectly sweet in that," the customer said, with conviction.

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said, with conviction : " You look perfectly sweet in that." Primrose blushed, as the customer added : " Really quite adorable." The frock was pink, a " confection " fresh from Paris, and extremely decorative. The customer decided that it merely needed the adjuncts of silk stockings and satin shoes. " I might wear with it a string of pearls—nothing else, but, my dear, it won't do. I can't wear pink. Pop on another." There happened to be another of the same size. Primrose put it on. The customer surveyed it critically : " I like the pink best, but I must buy this." She paid for the frock, ordered it to be sent at once to a house in Mayfair, and went her way.

Primrose enshrined the rejected frock in tissue paper and placed it in a drawer. But an entrancing vision of herself in that frock became an obsession. She had never believed that she could look so superlatively well in anything made by human hands. The customer had hit the right word—" adorable." The pink frock showed up to amazing advantage fair hair, blue eyes, and a white skin. It had indescribable elegance. Thinking of her three well-worn dance frocks provoked nausea, and the reflection : " I look so shop-worn in *them*." What effect would the pink frock have on Mr. Furley ? What would he think of her in it ? He admired " posh " girls ; he was particular about his own things. Probably at a public ball in Chelsea he would wear a swallowtail coat, a white waistcoat, and a white tie.

III.

UPON the night of the ball, which began at nine-thirty, Primrose met Mr. Furley at the South Kensington Tube Station. She was wearing a coney seal coat and a little *cloche* hat, which would be left in the ladies' cloak-room. Mr. Furley promptly perceived a new pair of satin shoes. As he pressed her hand, he murmured :—

" One pinch—for the new shoes."

He added, with his quiet air of consideration which so appealed to her :—

" Cinderella's slippers call for a taxi."

" No, no ; let's walk. Why do you call me Cinderella, Mr. Furley ? "

" You told me that you had never been to a big ball."

" I sha'n't have to run away at twelve. Mother is going to bed. I'm ever so excited. Isn't this a very expensive evening for you ? "

" One ought to fork out something for charity now and again. Primrose—you will see a live duchess to-night."

" Just fancy——! I do hope you won't feel ashamed of *me*."

He laughed unconcernedly.

Ten minutes later he was waiting for her outside the ladies' cloak-room. When she flitted up he blinked. There was no mistake about that. Then he shaded his eyes, as well he might, inasmuch as Primrose was hardly recognizable. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, but the tones of her voice were apprehensive. She asked, tentatively :—

" Do I look smart ? "

" I am dazzled," he said, slowly. She had supposed that chauffeurs knew nothing about frocks, but this man seemed to be appraising a Paris model with the critical expression of an expert.

" It's a new frock ? " he asked.

" Yes."

" Bought for this occasion ? " She nodded, as he continued, imperturbably :—

" I ought to have fetched you in the Rolls-Royce."

" Why didn't you ? " she laughed.

" Because I'm not built that way."

Side by side they walked into the ball-room.

IV.

ALL went well, too well, till supper-time. Primrose was aware that the pink frock had achieved its manifest destiny. Between dances Mr. Furley gazed at it (and what was in it) *adoringly*. He didn't gush ; he stared, till Primrose found herself blushing. In his way he was making love, although *his* way presented itself as a new way. For the first time he confided in her :—

" A girl let me down once—badly."

" Did she ? "

" Yes. Then, I suppose, I got a complex."

" I beg your pardon——? "

" You don't know what a complex is. Call it a parasite which attaches itself to the mind and body, because the mind affects the body. For instance, to-night, your body is responding to your mind. You look your best because you know that you are in your best."

" That's true."

" Because a girl let me down horribly, I was fool enough to think that all girls were cut to her pattern. My complex took the form of hating and despising young women."

" Oh-h-h ! "

" I make no excuses ; I simply state a fact. And I'm not going to spoil a delightful evening by telling you a sordid story. What I do want to say is this : you are the first girl I have met since that humiliating experience who has taken a very beastly taste out of my mouth. I cottoned to you at sight, Primrose. I knew that you were honest as the day, incapable of a mean thought or a mean action."

Primrose wriggled. She appeared to be distressed. In a quavering voice she faltered out :—

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"I'm not what you think me at all."

"Can you read my thoughts of you?"

"I—I might do something mean, if—if I was terribly tempted."

"Have you ever been terribly tempted?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, well, I'm sure you resisted temptation valiantly."

"Suppose I didn't. Would you hate me?"

"I couldn't hate you whatever you did. And then again the word 'mean,' a nasty little word, has to be defined. The mean man or woman is destitute of honour. There is honour even among thieves, so we are told, although petty thieving is mean in itself."

"Do let's talk of something else," pleaded Primrose.

Supper was served either at a buffet or at small tables. Mr. Furley secured a small table, and, to the astonishment of Primrose, ordered a bottle of champagne. When she protested, he replied, smilingly:—

"Charity covers such extravagance."

Two minutes afterwards a young and inexperienced waiter, attempting to carry four plates of fruit salad, collided with another waiter just behind Miss Jacom's chair. About a pint of *macédoine aux mille fruits* inundated her dance frock. Mr. Furley swore; the waiter apologized abjectly; Miss Jacom melted into tears.

Mr. Furley, however, rose to the occasion. He took instant command of the tearful Primrose, whisked her off to the ladies' cloak-room, interviewed the presiding genius of that place, and declared emphatically that something could be done and must be done to repair the damage.

"The frock is ruined," sobbed Primrose.

"Don't you believe it."

In less than fifteen minutes a miracle of cleansing was effected. The pair returned to the supper-room.

NOW Mr. Furley was a man of perception, certainly a super-chauffeur. He regarded this misadventure professionally; he thought to himself: "Too much juice—engine trouble—going will be as good as ever now that we've had an overhaul." But—it wasn't. The little bus refused to be steered, no pulling power, obviously out of commission. He said, encouragingly:—

"Matters might be worse, mightn't they?"

"I don't think they could be."

"I assure you that you look needlessly unhappy. The damage done is not visible."

"But it's there," she wailed.

"Eat your supper. Make the most of our good time."

She smiled faintly. He saw that she wanted to accept his advice, but the sparkle was out of her. His complex began to function again. *She was not a sport.* He would have staked his life that she would have laughed over the lamentable incident, thanking her stars that it had been no worse. Why did she look so piteous and forlorn?

"Shall I take you home?" he asked, after a pause.

"N-no—n-not yet. Mother might be awake."

This was cryptic. Primrose loved her mother. And the mother, if she was a sensible woman, would cheer the child up.

"I—I d-don't want to spoil our evening," she gulped.

"Then why do you do it?" he might have replied. Instead he insisted that she should drink her champagne. She sipped it timorously.

"Gulp it down. You'll feel pounds better."

Obediently she gulped it down.

Being unaccustomed to wine, the effect was instantaneous. Colour flowed back into her cheeks; she attacked some cold salmon with appetite.

"We won't order fruit-salad," said Mr. Furley.

She laughed.

"Oh, yes, we will."

"Ah! That's the right spirit."

"I've never had such a lovely supper. Only to think that some people live like this all the time——"

"Poor devils! Aren't you sorry for them?"

"Ought I to be?"

He explained—humorously, sensible that he was puzzling her, but surprised that she could apprehend the disabilities of the idle rich.

"I know," she said, "one can't have a good time all the time; one must *pay* for a good time."

"Exactly. Pay up and smile."

To amuse her, he pointed out certain "celebrities" whom he knew by sight, including the "live" duchess. Primrose, in her turn, recognized more than one "customer." Suddenly she gasped.

"What is it?"

"N-nothing."

"Primrose—you little fibber!"

"I—I just saw somebody who—who *might* recognize me."

"And if she did, what of it?"

"N-nothing."

"Two fibs in two seconds. Is your somebody that pretty girl in white and silver?"

"Ye-es. How sharp you are, Mr. Furley!"

"She is Lady Mary Mostyn. She's

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looking at you. Dash it! She's spotted *me*."

"You know Lady Mary Mostyn?"

"She knows me."

"Mr. Furley, I believe *you're* fibbing. If she knows you, you must know her."

He made no reply; and Primrose, following his alert eyes, perceived that Lady Mary had left her table and was approaching, a smile upon her lips. Mr. Furley rose from his chair.

"I saw you both," said Lady Mary. She turned to the blushing Primrose. "And I saw your frock. So you bought it yourself, eh? And you know Andrew Furley. What an odd coincidence! Do come and have coffee at our table. I mean to have a dance with you, Andrew; and I'll find a partner for you," she turned again to Primrose, "my own beautiful boy, to whom I'm engaged to be married."

At this moment Lady Mary became aware that she might have committed an indiscretion. So far as she was concerned, she believed Primrose to be a young gentlewoman who was "on her own" in a big shop. Nothing unusual about that. She had come to this conclusion in the emporium. To cover a possible indiscretion she went on gaily:—

"I have half-a-dozen friends working in smart shops; and you were so charming the other day that I intended to come again and try to scrape up friendship with you. It's such an opportunity to do that now. Please join us."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Furley. "We will, won't we, Primrose?"

She smiled, incapable of speech. Lady Mary nodded and returned to her table.

V.

MR. FURLEY, glancing at his companion's bewildered face, pulled himself together for a worthy effort.

"I suppose you know," he said, slowly, "that at a ball like this so-called class distinctions are scrapped?"

"Are they?"

"Quite properly. A duchess could take a turn with a shover. All the same, if you would rather not follow up this adventure any farther, I can easily make an excuse."

"You know best, Mr. Furley. Lady Mary was very sweet. *Who* is her 'boy'?"

"He'll be a swell some day. His name is Gillingham—Captain Gillingham."

"You know him too?"

"I have driven him, just as I've driven her."

"Really. I suppose your boss knows everybody?"

"Too many people know him; and he hates it."

Presently they crossed the supper-room and drank coffee at Lady Mary's table. Captain Gillingham was introduced to Miss Jacom, and chattered agreeably to her. Lady Mary appeared to be on the friendliest terms with Mr. Furley. When they finished coffee, the quartette returned to the ball-room, where dancing partners were changed. At the end of the dance, Captain Gillingham led Primrose to an alcove and said pleasant things about her dancing. Suddenly he asked a question:—

"Have you known Andrew Furley long?"

"Only a few weeks. We—we met at a dance. He asked me to come to this ball. He hasn't much time 'off,' nor have I. I work in a big emporium."

"So Mary told me. Very sporting of you."

"I have to; I don't get much sport out of it."

"Of course, I understand that it must be a crab for a girl like you, Miss Jacom, to be mixed up with the tag rag and bobtail, but life is a mix-up. I used the wrong word; it was awfully plucky of you to take such a billet."

"Luck had more to do with it than pluck. Mother was just able to pay the premium. And then, well, I had a knack of selling things, of—of pleasing customers."

"You pleased Mary. You made a big hit with her. She was quite delighted when she saw you—to-night; but it did puzzle us to see you with *him*."

"Why?"

"We know our Andrew."

"He has worked for you, perhaps?"

It was now Captain Gillingham's turn to deal with a possible indiscretion. Lady Mary had pointed out Miss Jacom, saying with enthusiasm: "Do look at that girl over there; she's a perfect darling; she sold me this frock; she works in an emporium. She might be anybody. *Heavens! the man with her is Andrew Furley.* Is she a poor relation?" That had been enough for both of them. But, at this instant, it dawned upon Captain Gillingham that a grievous mistake might have been made. Obviously, Miss Jacom knew little or nothing about Andrew Furley. Ought he to enlighten her ignorance?

He answered with restraint:—

"I have known Andrew Furley for years. Perhaps you know that he was shot to bits during the retreat from Mons?"

"I—I didn't."

"Then he volunteered for the Transport Service——"

"I *do* know that."

"He was badly disfigured——"

"As if that mattered——"

"He thought it mattered."

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A pause followed, broken by Primrose.

"Will you tell me why you and Lady Mary thought it odd that I should be here with Mr. Furley?"

Then, indeed, he knew that it was even more than odd, but, being a man, he dissembled.

"We happened to know, Miss Jacom, that he shunned young women as if they were a pestilence."

She nodded. Captain Gillingham led her across the ballroom, and delivered her to Mr. Furley, who was standing beside Lady Mary. The band struck up. Andrew and Primrose were left alone.

"Shall we sit out this dance, Primrose?"

Without waiting for a reply he led the way to another alcove. She was sensible of a change in him, and wondered why he was frowning.

"I have something of importance to say to you," he murmured, as she sat down.

VI.

"LADY MARY has just asked me why I brought you to this ball."

"How funny! Why shouldn't you? I dare say mother would think it sinful extravagance, but that is your affair, isn't it? Certainly it isn't Lady Mary's."

"Lady Mary is a good sort, and she likes you. I didn't answer her directly; it was easy to evade her question, but there can be no evasion between me and you. I asked you to come here with me to-night because I love you. Will you marry me as reasonably soon as may be?"

"Mr. Furley——!"

"Andrew, or Andy, please."

His eyes sought hers, but she looked away from him—at her frock. Part of the frock was still damp; she was touching it with quivering fingers. It seemed to him that she was trying to peer through the overfrock at the stained white satin under-slip. At such a moment her mind—if she had a mind—appeared to be concentrated on her frock. Kipling's line: "A rag, and a bone, and a hank of hair," occurred to him. Had he asked *that* to marry him?

"I—I c-can't marry you," she whispered, in a broken voice.

"Why not?"

"B-b-because of this f-frock——"

"What——?"

"You wouldn't w-want to m-marry me if you knew about this frock."

"Am I crazy, or are you?"

"You said that I was incapable of a mean thought or a mean action." She spoke more firmly, but kept her eyes upon her frock.

"And so you are."

"I stole this frock."

"You stole that frock——!"

"Yes; I did it deliberately. I thought I would wear it to-night and put it back to-morrow. I'm in charge of these dance frocks. Nobody could find out. But they'll find out sooner or later, and then I shall be looking for another job with the character of a thief to help me find it."

Her voice was piteous.

Andrew touched her hand; he could do nothing more in such a public place.

"You—you *borrowed* the frock, because you thought that it would please me to see you in it?"

"And it did. You know it did. The others were so shabby. Why do you shame me by saying 'borrowed'? Every thief says that."

"All right. You *stole* this frock to please me. That makes me in a way a party to the misdemeanour. I remember telling you to wear your smartest frock——"

"You did."

"Have you ever been tempted to do this sort of thing before?"

"Mr. Furley——! How dare you? Of course not."

"Then it comes to this—you stole for the first time in your life on my account?" She nodded. "Then you must have wanted most tremendously to spend this evening with me?"

"I have been a crazy fool."

"Cheer up! You are in a hole; perhaps I can pull you out of it. I suppose that neither you nor your mother could pay for this frock—buy it, I mean?"

"Mother might; but I'd rather throw myself into the river than ask her for the money."

"Poor little Primrose! No wonder you were upset at supper. And yet, with this on your mind, you played up, dried your eyes, pretended that you were having a good time?"

"You asked me to."

"I see that I'm even more responsible for what has happened than I thought. I haven't much money on me, but how much is wanted?"

"Fifteen guineas."

"I can just about manage that—to-morrow. You shall have it, if—if I have to *borrow* it."

"Do you mean steal it?"

"I would steal it to save you."

"Oh-h-h!"

"Isn't it time you answered my question: Will you marry me?"

"If it all leaks out through Lady Mary?"

"It won't. I promise you that. Why, she or Gillingham would lend me the money, if I asked for it. You love me, Primrose. You have proved that up to the hilt."

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" You've known that I loved you, haven't you ? "

" Not, I swear, till this minute. I didn't think that a girl could love me absolutely for myself. Even now," he continued, vehemently, " there is the hateful thought that you might take me simply because I can hand over a miserable sum of fifteen guineas."

She smiled at him so pathetically that he hated himself.

" I believe you do love me," he whispered, " as a man hopes and prays to be loved."

" I can't help loving you, but it's too dreadful to take your hard-earned money. We can't get married yet. *If* I save up——"

She never finished the sentence. Captain Gillingham prevented that. Five minutes' talk with Lady Mary had imposed upon him what he reckoned to be an extremely unpleasant duty. He and his *fiancée* agreed that the eyes of an innocent girl must be opened—and at once. He spoke gravely :—

" Will you give me another dance later on, Miss Jacom ? "

" I'm afraid I shall be going home soon."

" I'm so sorry. Better luck next time. You must persuade Sir Andrew to bring you to the next ball here."

He bowed and retired.

" What did he mean ? " asked Primrose.

" He meant mischief, my dearest Miss Jacom. He wanted to warn you, the heroine of the show, against the arts and crafts of the wicked baronet."

" You—*you* are a baronet ? "

" For my father's sins—yes. He began life with a pick and shovel. What he picked and shovelled up in the course of a long life enabled him to buy a baronetcy. I'm not proud of that. But I am proud of being the son of a worker, and I work myself nearly as hard as he did."

" You are your own boss ? "

" I was, Primrose, till a minute ago. Now you are my boss. Shall we cross the floor and announce our engagement to two good friends, who are seriously concerned about us ? Come—— ! "

For an instant she gazed pensively at her frock.

" Andy——"

" Yes ? "

" I shall put this frock into a glass case and keep it for ever and ever."

" Amen," said Sir Andrew Furley.

ACROSTICS.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 183.

(*The Third of the Series.*)

O, WHAT an elegant pair to view,
When the animals went in two by two !

1. A deer that is far from being the least.
2. Camelious, South American beast.
3. From an antelope one letter goes.
4. A wrinkly dog with a turned-up nose.
5. The river-horse leaves one quarter behind.
6. The crocodile is the American kind.
7. The bulls and the cows are both turned round.
8. And the leopard-cat is backward found.

REMUS.

Answers to Acrostic No. 183 *should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor,* THE STRAND MAGAZINE, *Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on October* 10*th.*

To every light one alternative answer may be sent; it should be written at the side. At the foot of his answer every solver should write his pseudonym and nothing else.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 182.

(*The Second of the Series.*)

FROM office, from townhouse, from villa, from flat,
Go holiday-makers to this and to that ;
In this there are fields, rivers, hedgerows, and trees,
At that dancing waves, yellow sands, and salt breeze.

1. Here are acrobats, horses, hoops, clowns gay and silly ;
One in London, much altered, is called Piccadilly.
2. A horrible giant of fairy-tale days,
With cannibal diet and blustering ways.
3. More useful when open than shut, it is plain ;
Companion, well ribbed, that you take in the rain.
4. Fate vengeful, retributive justice, is this ;
You'll find me inside, closely followed by sis.
5. A Cinema Palace in London, and yet
A town in the fair land of Italy set.
6. Three monarchs of England were called by this name—
The first, Lion-hearted Crusader of fame.
7. Old times are departed, old days left behind ;
Three-quarters is mineral not yet refined.

BOODLEBAR.

1. C	ircu	S
2. O	gr	E
3. U	mbrell	A
4. N	emesi	S
5. T	ivol	I
6. R	lchar	D
7. Y	or	E

NOTE.—Light 7. Ore.

THIRTY-EIGHTH SERIES : RESULT.

Every light in the series was correctly solved by more than one competitor, but no one succeeded in solving every light. Full marks for the four acrostics amounted to 34 ; Aon, Cyno, Hajo, Misner, Royal, and Wahed scored 33, and will share the prizes. They will receive two guineas each, and must be considered ineligible for acrostic prizes in the current (thirty-ninth) series.

Aon is Mr. J. E. W. Taylor, 90, Long Thornton Road, Norbury, S.W.16 ; Cyno is Mr. C. Norman, 28, Duke's Avenue, New Malden, Surrey ; Hajo is Mr. J. Harling, 120A, Richmond Road, Raynes Park, S.W.20 ; Misner is Miss Gardiner, 13, Chatham Road, Kingston-on-Thames ; Royal is Mr. G. E. Syms, 342, Downham Way, Bromley, Kent ; Wahed is Mr. W. N. Armstrong, 40, Langdon Park Road, N.6.

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NEW SERIES. No. 1.

Cases from my Crime Book

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

(Criminologist and former pupil of M. Bertillon.)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The stories which I have selected for this series can be found in the official records, only one or two details having been rearranged in order to avoid giving pain and reopening old wounds.

THE VENDETTA.

I WAS about to enter Bertillon's office with some photographic prints when Durand, his confidential secretary, came stumbling through the doorway with flushed and angry face. He stopped when he saw me.

"Unless the chief sent for you, don't go in; he's in one of his black moods."

Rousseau, who had joined us, chuckled hoarsely: "No wonder! The *juge d'instruction* and the prefect of police have been making themselves objectionable. Even Bertillon is not infallible, but they seem to think so."

"I suppose these photographs of smashed safes which I've just finished have something to do with the matter," I suggested; for I had been absent several months in Marseilles and out of touch with the latest cases at our Paris headquarters. Rousseau glanced at them casually and nodded.

At that moment a harsh voice called my name, and as the electric bolt which my chief operated from his desk caused the door to swing open, I heard him exclaim:—

"For Heaven's sake come in or go away. Nature should have equipped us with earlids to shut out sound at will. No one seems to be able to do anything but talk to-day."

I tiptoed noiselessly over the soft carpet and sank into a comfortable chair.

Bertillon was sitting with his hands pressed rigidly to his temples, and I was surprised and shocked at his appearance. His beard, usually so neatly brushed, looked like a thorny shrub, and it was apparent he had not shaved that day. Minutes passed in complete silence. A shaded table lamp still shed a pale circle of light, although a cold streak of winter sunshine struck full on his desk. It was obvious that my harassed chief had sat there through the long night. In front of him was a tray full of cigar stumps, and an electric coffee-pot sizzled by his side. At last he looked up with heavy, inflamed eyes.

"Sorry, my friend. My nerves are on edge. I seem to be unable to think somehow. What have you there?"

I placed my prints on M. Bertillon's desk; then without a word opened a cupboard crammed with chemicals and mixed him a

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sedative. He sniffed at it and nodded understandingly when I removed the coffee. I had fully expected him to resent my interference, but instead, to my joy, he gulped the contents of the glass with a wry face, sank back with a sigh, and closed his eyes. Slowly his tense expression relaxed and the blood began to pulse more regularly in the swollen arteries. Half an hour passed while neither moved nor spoke. Finally Bertillon roused himself.

"Thanks, you did well. Caffeine and strychnine have kept me going, but I suppose there is a limit to human endurance. I'll just give you an outline of what we have to do this morning. You have been away so long that you know nothing of our latest problem. Whilst you are collecting the required outfit I'll lie down; we must be prepared for a thorough search before valuable traces are destroyed. Call up the garage, will you, and order a fast car."

Whilst waiting for the exchange to put me through, I covertly watched Bertillon. His flexible hands were busy arranging a sheaf of documents, but the drugs I had administered were already overcoming him, and I perceived that he was battling with an overpowering desire to sleep.

"Will you not rest until noon, sir?" I suggested, quietly. "Colbert can guard the place until you come. Meanwhile, if you give me your instructions, Rousseau and I will carry out a preliminary investigation."

Bertillon rose unsteadily.

"Go along, then. I trust you implicitly. Nothing must be disturbed. It seems a double murder has been committed at Montmorency. Rousseau knows where it is and what to do. I'll join you when I've rested."

One of the safes broken open by Ferrari's gang.

THE AUDACIOUS BURGLARIES.

I FOUND Rousseau and related what had passed.

"I can sympathize with our chief," he said, with a queer gleam in his eyes. "This gang of housebreakers is unique, and it looks like a bad defeat for us."

"Why," I exclaimed in surprise, "you don't mean he is so worried about a mere series of burglaries! I've had a lot of work connected with them since I came back, but I imagined it was just the usual thing. He said something about a murder."

"Yes; and I fancy it was committed by the same gang. Their methods are something entirely new. Country houses in Garches, St. Germain, Versailles, and Chantilly have been robbed by them with impunity, although the houses were occupied. The queer part is that twice the thieves used dynamite to break into safes, yet the inmates heard nothing. They also possess a new tool which cuts a six-inch hole through tempered steel. Bertillon believes it to be a kind of circular frame which grips the surface by means of four pegs, for which small holes are first drilled. An inner rim with tiny, incredibly sharp teeth then revolves slowly, but with irresistible pressure. They heat the steel through which they intend to cut with a Fouché blowpipe, and when it is white-hot direct a stream of oxygen against it. This renders the metal porous and brittle.

"They take only jewellery, plate, and money. Their hauls already amount to more than two million francs. What we cannot understand is why they have never been surprised nor seen, since they appear to operate with complete indifference to noise."

"Do they leave no finger-prints?" I asked.

"Yes, we have several times found a queer circular smudge, and the impression of a huge right hand on the safes and furniture, but so far the marks have not been identified. There are one or two points which the chief believes to be very important. The burglaries did not begin until the weather became wintry, and all the houses entered have old-fashioned hearths, besides steam heating. The robberies generally took place when the inmates were assembled in the *salon*, where a log fire was blazing. In every case they appear to have fallen asleep whilst reading or chatting, and awoke to find their valuables gone."

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "You know well enough that the narcotics criminals

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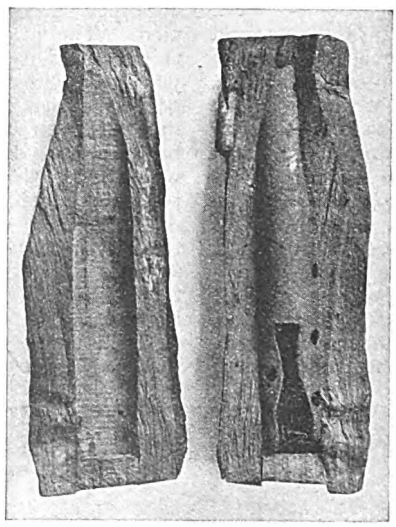
use are only effective in food or drink."

"I know—nevertheless this gang has discovered an efficient device. We found several lumps of lead, and in one instance a queer perforated iron tube, among the ashes. A typical case is that of a notary at Ville d'Avray. He informed us that his safe had been opened and a large sum of money taken. He was known to be in financial straits and was heavily insured; the insurance company accuses him of having faked the robbery, because the safe, an old-fashioned affair, had been opened with his own key, which was still in the lock. He also averred that he had fallen asleep on a couch in front of the fire after a hard day's work, and awoke shivering with cold at two in the morning. The fire was out and a window stood wide open."

"Probably the insurance people are right."

Rousseau shook his head.

"There were a round smudge and the prints of a thumb and first finger on the window; the marks were the same as those found in the other houses. He couldn't fake that! Besides, we arrived before dawn and immediately questioned the valet. The fellow appeared weak and ill. He was only brought round after much trouble. He remembered carrying coffee and brandy into his master's room after dinner, about ten o'clock, but he did not remember going to bed. The coffee still stood untouched on a small table. On the carpet we found a large stain where cognac had been upset, and the decanter on the tray was half empty. There were also microscopic fragments of glass near the spilled brandy and a liqueur glass was missing. The servant's sleeve and shirt cuff were soaked with cognac, and on his right hand was a small cut and traces of the spirit. Furthermore, he had gone to bed in his day-shirt instead of putting on the pyjamas he always wore at night. Caught in a cuff link was a leaf, and on the stairs leading to his room we discovered a twig torn from a small palm. When we examined the plant itself, which stood near the stairs, we perceived that it had been upset but replaced. Some earth had fallen to the floor and the heavy china pot was not standing on the circle it had marked in the varnish of the mahogany pedestal. The inference is clear. The servant had become unconscious and fallen to the floor whilst pouring out the cognac. He had been carried to his room and put to bed."



One of the poison containers, showing how it was embedded in a log.

"The cognac was drugged?" I suggested.

"No; coffee and brandy were analysed. There was nothing wrong with them. Bertillon discovered that the day before the burglary the steam heating had gone wrong, and because of this a fire was lit. Furthermore, there was the open window, obviously for ventilation. One other detail, which at first made us hope that we should quickly pick up the trail of the band, is that in every instance a new maid had been engaged a few days before a robbery was committed, and she left soon after. Three of these girls have been traced to other situations and appear to be quite respectable. But in the case of the notary, the maid disappeared the evening the safe was rifled and has not been found. All the known receivers are being watched, so far without result; nor has any informer come in. At four this morning an urgent call came through from the gendarmerie at Montmorency. Apparently two people have been killed, and, although we have no details as yet, Bertillon believes that the same criminal organization has been at work. He is convinced that the open log fires are in some way connected with all these crimes. We have discovered that in every instance the wood came from a shop in the Rue Thoulozet at Montmartre. I have been ordered to go and have a look at the place. Put on some old clothes and come with me."

WE VISIT THE WOOD-YARD.

WE had no difficulty in finding the place, for Inspector Louys and two of his men, dressed as workmen, were busy repairing an imaginary hole in the pavement opposite the premises of a coal and wood merchant. Above the gate were the words, "Dupont & Cie, Wholesale Dealers."

There was no concierge, but when we entered a yard littered with logs of pine and olive wood, a bold, handsome girl came

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forward at once with a lazy, impertinent smile and barred our way. I explained that we had come to buy a stock of wood to sell in the suburbs. Whilst we haggled over the price I watched her brilliant black eyes flicker over us from head to foot with a curious defiant expression. Suddenly she called: "Angelo, come here!" Instantly the door of a tiny office of rough boards swung wide and a tall, muscular man, with the curly hair and flowing beard of a Jewish patriarch, appeared in the opening. He shuffled down the steps with a queer dragging limp, and I noticed that his left shoulder was deformed. The advent of this extraordinary creature was so unexpected that for a moment I forgot the part I was playing and stared in undisguised amazement.

As he passed the girl she said something rapidly in a foreign tongue, at which he scowled fiercely, and, pointing to the gate we had left open, motioned her to shut it.

"If you intend to rob us," Rousseau growled, "you'll not get much." The girl laughed shrilly and clapped her hands. This was a signal, for at once a squat, sunburned man advanced from a side door, followed by a stalwart negro.

"Well," I exclaimed, "you are queer people! We come to buy wood and it looks as though we've dropped into a den of thieves."

"These men will count your logs," the bearded man replied, with a leer. "Come, Concha." With that he turned and limped through the doorway. I saw Rousseau start as though about to spring after him, but he restrained himself in time, for the two assistants had drawn together, their fists clenched menacingly.

"Open that gate!" I cried, sharply; "I don't like your manners. We'll buy our wood elsewhere."

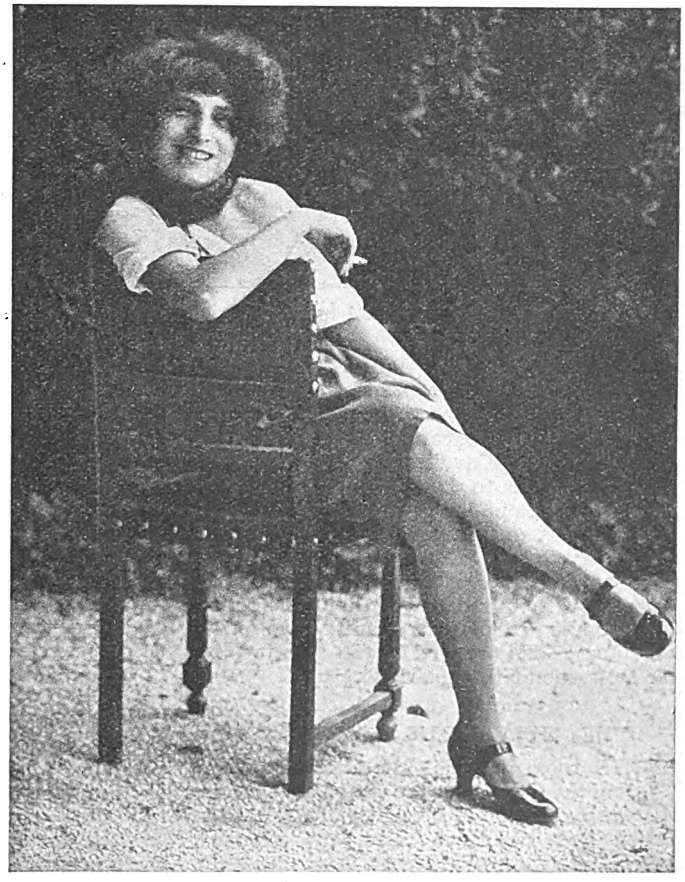
Without a word, the negro pulled a key from his belt and lifted the bar. We hurriedly crossed the street, but Louys and his men were no longer to be seen."

"Stay here," Rousseau said, in a low voice. "I'll call a couple of police to guard the rear, and I'll telephone to the Sûreté. Then we'll also set a watch at the gate. Bertillon was right; this is the gang's headquarters."

Five minutes later he returned in a car.

"Jump in. Dufresne wants us to come to Montmorency at once. He is sending men to raid this place to-night. Meanwhile detectives will watch every way in or out."

The captain of gendarmes, who had telephoned from Montmorency, arrived just as we drew up in front of the villa where a tragedy had occurred. Dufresne and Bertillon were already waiting and immediately questioned him. His story was that whilst they were making their last rounds towards dawn, two of his cyclist police had been nearly killed by a large touring car which had suddenly appeared out of the gloom, without sounding a warning and with no lights showing. It had come so abruptly and noiselessly that they were convinced it had been standing not far away, and started on the steep down grade of the road



Concepcion, a leading member of Ferrari's gang.

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at sight of their lamps. The driver had swerved towards them and deliberately attempted to knock them over. Before the startled men had recovered from the shock the car disappeared in the swirling mist.

The police were at first inclined to give chase, but the speed of the car convinced them that this was hopeless. Instead, one had pedalled at full speed to the gendarmerie and telephoned a description of the mysterious vehicle to the various stations, while his colleague had walked slowly along the path until he discovered a patch of oil which proved that the car had indeed been stationed for some time in front of a house belonging to a Monsieur Cavallo, who was well known in Montmorency.

The gendarme had tested the door and found it shut, but to his surprise, since the night was bitterly cold, the window of the drawing-room on the ground floor stood wide open. By the light of his electric torch he saw that two people were lying on their faces in front of a wide, old-fashioned fireplace. With commendable prudence he had thrown his cape over the window ledge and climbed in, taking care not to disturb anything. The two prone figures were M. Cavallo and his wife, and both appeared to be dead. Fortunately, there was a telephone in the house, and the gendarme at once telephoned to his chief, who arrived soon after with a doctor. A cursory examination convinced the doctor that life was indeed extinct, and the police officer had thereupon placed two men on guard and reported the matter to M. Dufresne at the Quai d'Orsay.

El Jugador, the one-armed Spaniard.

THE MYSTERIOUS POISONING.

THE room in which the bodies lay was on the right of a wide corridor. A large table stood in the centre and a leather couch and two arm-chairs were grouped before it, facing a wide hearth, in which a heap of flaky ashes showed that a wood fire had recently burned. On the carpet just in front of one of the chairs was the huddled shape of a woman. She had slipped from the cushions to the carpet, and lay with knees drawn up and arms outflung, as though she had attempted to rise but had been overcome by some intangible, brutal force which had killed her instantly. There was no sign of a wound, and her curly black hair and filmy lace dress were not even disarranged. The man had evidently attempted to reach his wife when he felt the approach of death. One hand still clutched the wire of a table lamp, which he had dragged to the floor, whilst his right hand gripped the woman's shoulder. Bertillon dropped to his knees and lifted each head in turn.

"They have been poisoned," he muttered. "Yet there is no drink in the room." For a moment he bent over the unfortunate woman, his nose close to her lips.

"No narcotic has been used this time, but cyanic acid. Now I wonder——?"

His eyes wandered to the ashes in the grate.

"Search those, Rousseau," he ordered, sharply. "But be careful. Put on gloves and tie a handkerchief over your nose."

Whilst Rousseau probed in the hearth I prepared my cameras. Abruptly Rousseau gave an exclamation and held out a perforated metal cylinder. Bertillon sprang eagerly forward, and, seizing the tube with the tongs, carried it to the window.

"That's it. The same method. These tubes are filled with drugs and inserted in hollow logs, which are then glued together again. In this case it was sectioned and contained sulphuric acid and cyanide. When the fire heated the metal the two chemicals combined, and the most deadly of gases spurted out through those holes and killed these people. Photograph the room and the bodies!" Bertillon added, turning to me.

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"And place this devilish invention in one of our boxes."

Rousseau had meanwhile continued his search of the fireplace.

"There are several iron pipes, chief, and some lumps of lead," he announced.

"That was to be expected," Bertillon replied. "One would not be enough. Those lumps were probably lead cylinders, but the fire melted them. Pack them all carefully and fill a tin with some of the wood ashes. I see there are still some logs stacked in that brass box. They must be removed to the laboratory."

When I had taken the required photographs, Bertillon drew a powerful torch and his favourite lens from a pocket, and once more dropped to his knees beside the woman. His flexible fingers flickered like an insect's antennæ over dress, hair, and face. They probed minutely yet disturbed nothing. Suddenly I saw him peer eagerly at the left hand, which lay clutching the carpet.

"Ha! this is something! A tiny dagger tattooed between thumb and forefinger. The shape is Italian—no—Corsican!" he exclaimed, shrilly. "As always, a woman will lead us to the criminals. She has the black hair and olive skin of the South. A vendetta, I'll wager." Rising quickly, Bertillon walked to the door. "I see that this house, like the notary's, has steam heating," he said, "but the radiators are cold. Go and look at the furnace and boiler, Rousseau."

Hardly had my colleague gone when Bertillon suddenly stooped and I saw that he had picked up something which glittered from a bearskin rug against the wall.

"A silver medal," he said. "On one side is a bull with horns lowered as though about to charge, and beneath it: 'Buena suerte' (Good luck). On the other side just the word 'Sevilliano.' A Spanish matador's charm, I fancy, and Sevilliano is the fellow's name. It was on a chain which became entangled with the key in that desk and the last link snapped. A Corsican dagger and a Spanish charm—what a queer mixture! Well, there is nothing further here. Have you noted the details? Then come with me."

Police guarding the approach to the leather factory.

From a flashlight photograph taken by a reporter.

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Part of the poison factory established by Ferrari in the cellar under the leather factory.

I followed Bertillon into the hall just as Rousseau appeared.

"Someone tried to light the furnace, chief, for the wood had caught, but it went out again, and there is a strong smell of smoke in the cellar. I believe the flue is stopped up."

"Good. Then we'll examine the top floor and the chimney. Come along."

HOW THE GANG WORKED.

HINGED to a beam passing under the sloping roof was a ladder which led to a skylight, and on each side were servants' rooms. The door of one stood wide open. It had obviously been occupied and showed every sign of a hasty departure. The electric light over a small mirror was still switched on, and some white powder had been spilled on the floor. The bed had not been slept in, but a depression in the blankets showed where a heavy bag had rested. Bertillon pointed to a piece of leather on the floor. It was the flap of a pocket mirror. "One of the girls again," he said. "This gang always places a confederate inside the house. Those maids we traced are undoubtedly members of the band."

"There is a woman's footprint on this ladder," Rousseau cried. "The skylight has been opened quite recently; some flakes of rust from the iron frame have fallen to the ground and there is the mark of a hand on the dirty glass." A moment later we heard his voice from the roof.

"A sack has been stuffed into the chimney, that's why the furnace could not be lighted. Shall I bring it down?"

"Yes, but wrap it in paper. It must be examined," my chief answered. "Now let's go to the rooms below."

Cavallo and his wife had occupied separate rooms. Bertillon hardly glanced at them, but went straight to the bathroom. He remained there so long that I pushed open the door. He looked up at the sound, and I saw that his face was flushed and his eyes unnaturally bright. His whole attitude exuded triumph; yet he was only holding an empty silver frame, which had probably contained a portrait. As I advanced he showed me a little slip of some reddish-brown substance, which for the moment I could not identify.

"A broken finger-nail, my friend, stained with henna and grey underneath. An Arab or Soudanese left that."

"The fellow we saw in the Rue Thoulozet?" Rousseau exclaimed.

"Undoubtedly. I imagine this silver frame contained the dead woman's portrait. That dagger tattooed on her hand and your description of the bearded man who is probably the leader convinces me that this double murder is a Corsican vendetta. If

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so, the fellow may try to reach his island home when he discovers we are on his track. That place in the Rue Thoulozet must be raided immediately and all the inmates arrested. Pack this empty powder box. The bodies can be removed now."

A FIRE AT THE WOOD-YARD.

A MOMENT later I heard my chief telephoning to the various departments at the Sûreté. But we were not to capture the cunning criminals so easily. Just as we were preparing to return to Paris, Inspector Louys arrived in a police car. His clothes were torn and charred in several places.

"A fire broke out in the wood-dealer's yard soon after I had posted my men," he explained. "We broke down the gates, but the place was filled with poisonous fumes. The firemen had to send for masks, and when we succeeded in getting into the house there was no one there. They evidently had a secret exit, but we couldn't find it because the whole building collapsed."

Now began a rush of feverish activity at headquarters. No one thought of rest. Telegrams were dispatched to Corsica and Marseilles; and Rousseau, Colbert, and Inspector Louys were instructed to search the haunts of the underworld for the bearded man and his accomplices. Descriptions of the girls who had worked as maids in the various houses were also circulated everywhere. Bertillon surprised me by adding a one-armed man with black hair to the list. I inquired what led him to believe in the existence of such a person.

"Use your brains, my friend," he said, with a smile. "He is the skilled expert of the gang. Every safe these people broke into bore the traces of a round smudge and the marks of a right hand only."

"And the black hair?" I asked.

"Corsica and Spain have few fair men. But that is only a guess on my part."

Morning had come when I carried the results of our laboratory work to Bertillon's office. With him was M. Duperret, the *juge d'instruction*, and Dufresne. With a muttered apology my chief glanced at the photographs and reports. Then he straightened up and said: "My investigation is now complete. This murder of Monsieur Cavallo and the woman, for she was not his wife, has given us definite results. The band which committed all these burglaries and the murder at Montmorency is composed chiefly of women. Apache girls, if you like! There is also a negro and two Spaniards. One of these is a noted cracksman who lost his arm in Morocco, and the other a former matador known as Sevilliano. Both have been convicted in Madrid for housebreaking. But the leader and brains of the gang is the strangest personality we have yet encountered. He is a Corsican named Angelo Ferrari: he studied biology and chemistry in Rome, became a doctor, and practised for some years in Ajaccio. There is a break of fifteen years in his record, but it is believed he travelled much and was esteemed for his medical skill in Abyssinia. That explains the black confederate. Four years ago he married Elsa Lavalette, a beautiful woman whose life he saved. But she soon tired of her husband and ran away with Cavallo. Ferrari swore the vendetta against the man and his faithless wife, and must have traced them to Paris. I fancy he formed this gang only in order to find them, for none of the spoil has been sold so far as we know. The girl who was seen in the Rue Thoulozet will lead us to Ferrari. Her name is Concepcion. She is the wife of Sevilliano, but in love with the Corsican. It was Ferrari who conceived the idea of the poison in the logs. Here is one of them. We have removed the drugs," and Bertillon held out a piece of wood in which a perforated metal tube had been inserted. "We have not yet analysed the stuff, but when heated it gives off a dense gas which acts as a powerful narcotic. It will be some time before we discover the exact composition. But the murders were committed with cyanide."

Tom Tom.

From a police photograph taken in Algiers.

"How did you find out about Ferrari, monsieur?" Duperret asked.

"I was convinced that poison was being

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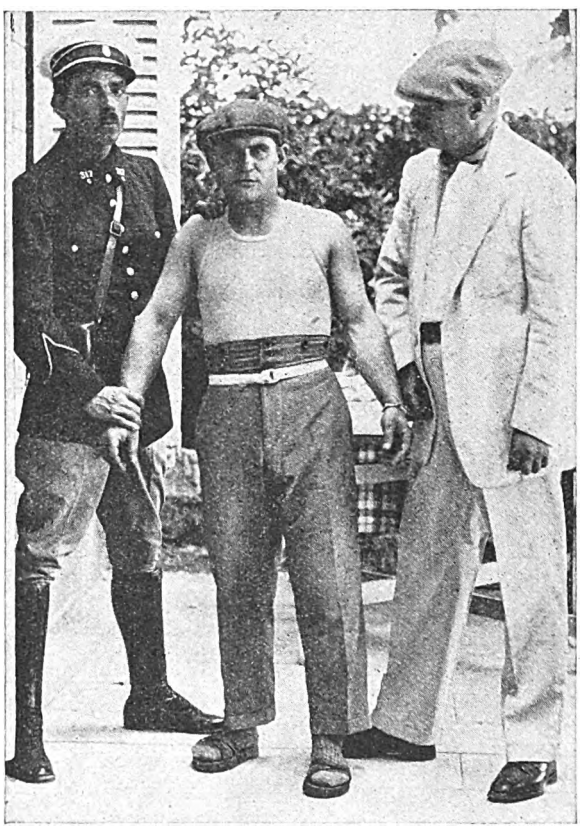
used in a novel manner and became suspicious of the logs when I discovered that they all came from the same place. We traced them weeks ago through the delivery vans. But since the business in the Rue Thoulozet appeared to be genuine, I feared that a premature search of the premises would merely put the criminals on their guard. Fortunately, the day after the murder Ferrari was foolish enough to show himself, and I at once telegraphed his description to Ajaccio. I received his history this morning."

"I take it the Corsican police also identified the dead woman?" the magistrate said.

"No; we've had no time for that. But they identified the tattooed dagger. It is the mark of Ferrari's clan. You may rest assured we shall soon capture them all."



The arrest of Sevilliano at Marseilles.
From a photograph taken by a reporter.

OUR FIRST CAPTURE.

WHEN I arrived at the Sûreté the next day, Rousseau was waiting in my office with an envelope containing a few grains of strongly perfumed powder and a broken pocket mirror.

"Bertillon wishes you to compare this powder with that in the box we found in the bathroom at Montmorency. I expect this mirror fits the leather flap picked up in the servant's bedroom.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"Oh, powder and glass were in the belt of a girl who was lying in a field at the Plaine St. Denis, close to the Spanish colony," Rousseau remarked, casually. "Quite dead, too. The doctor says she was strangled. The colony was at once raided and we got the one-armed expert. His name is El Jugador. He's in a cell below. The others are still in hiding somewhere, but we've taken care to let the man's arrest be known. The papers are printing a brief note that he appears willing to confess."

"You think they'll communicate with him?"

"No doubt of it. It's an old trick, but a good one. He may write and receive letters and have his meals sent from a restaurant."

Rousseau was right. The following day Bertillon handed me an envelope which was addressed to our prisoner.

It was just a short letter telling the man not to worry, and that his wife and children were well. "Invisible ink," I suggested.

"Oh, no—nothing so crude. Remember, Angelo is a very clever fellow. The message is under the postage-stamp and written in cipher with acid. All he has to do is to soak the envelope in water until the stamp comes off and then hold it against the steam pipe in his cell. We photographed it by transparency and got a good print. It seems 'he is not to talk and Concepcion will apply for permission to visit him as a Salvation Army lass.' Well, we shall raise no objection. Louys will follow Concepcion, of course. By the way, did you analyse the powder Rousseau brought you?"

"Yes, sir. It's the same as that in Cavallo's bathroom."

Bertillon nodded. "I thought so. That girl found strangled near the Spanish colony was evidently Cavallo's maid and one of the band. She had a cipher message hidden in her stocking. Apparently Ferrari did not mean to murder his faithless wife,

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for it was the text of a telegram intended to call her away. It was never sent. We've investigated at the post-office. That's why the Corsican executed her. She was formerly a hotel thief named Charlotte la Belle."

The next day a demure middle-aged woman in the familiar blue of the Salvation Army came to visit El Jugador. The disguise was perfect, and had we not read the message under the stamp we should never have recognized handsome Concepcion. A warder remained present during the interview and reported that she had only spoken of religious matters and given the prisoner several tracts. These were seized, and on the margin of one, written with the wax end of a vesta, was a long message informing the Spaniard "that the chief would try to bribe the warders so that files could be smuggled in to him; or as a last resort they would attack the police van after the trial. Meanwhile, the chief and Sevilliano were preparing to cross to Corsica, where they would organize a band with the help of the notorious bandit Michaeli. Concepcion would remain in Paris at the old address."

Louys returned late in the evening. Concepcion had been so sure of her disguise that he had been able to follow without arousing her suspicion. Ferrari and his band were hiding in cunningly masked cellars below a leather factory at the Plaine St. Denis. Within an hour we had posted men in every alley leading to the building. Dufresne and Bertillon supervised the arrangements, for they knew that every house was a death trap and honeycombed with secret subterranean passages. The moment we appeared invisible watchers called to each other, and warning whistles sounded from all sides. It had to be a rush on foot, for neither car nor cycle could thread the labyrinth of dirty streets, which were littered with huge heaps of scrap iron, refuse, and barrels.

Angelo Ferrari, the leader of the gang.

A BARRIER OF GIRLS.

WE had almost reached the factory when a fierce mob suddenly dashed at us with gleaming knives, but a volley fired over their heads caused them to scatter, and the uniformed cycle police at once formed a double hedge to guard our backs. Broken telegraph poles made excellent battering rams, but it was some minutes before the heavily-barred doors of the building gave way. The interior was divided into countless workrooms, but only empty vats and rusty machinery met our gaze as we ran frantically up and down the rotting stairs. Abruptly, Rousseau gripped my arm and pointed to a tiny streak of light on the ceiling, which came from a trap-door under a mound of untanned hides. Willing hands cleared these away and we scrambled down a crazy ladder into a stone-paved cellar. Sitting on upturned barrels and boxes in a corner, calmly smoking cigarettes, were six girls, and behind them, pistol in hand, stood Concepcion. It was obvious that these girls had been ordered to hold us until the leaders escaped. We could not treat them as we would men, and they struggled like furies when the detectives attempted to pass, whilst Concepcion laughed and shouted with glee. When at last they had been carried, clawing and biting savagely, to the room above, we discovered a second tunnel under the improvised seats of barrels and boxes. This led to the chemical laboratory and workshop where the poison tubes had been manufactured, but by that time Ferrari, the Spaniard, and Concepcion had escaped.

Dufresne at once commandeered a special train to take us to Marseilles. We knew that if the leader and his two accomplices reached the Mediterranean coast before we arrived, it would be an easy matter for them to obtain a boat and escape to Spain or Corsica. The chief of the Marseilles police was already waiting on the platform when we descended from the train.

"We have every likely place watched," he said. "So far they've not been seen. I posted special men at the harbour the moment I received your message and descriptions. You'd better come to the Commissariat and rest, then we'll comb through the haunts likely to shelter the fugitives."

It seemed incredible that, with the entire French police force seeking three such

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conspicuous people, they should be able to disappear, yet as the days passed we began to fear that in some fashion they had succeeded in putting to sea. Then abruptly Rousseau came with the news that Sevilliano had been seen talking to a boatman near the harbour. A gendarme had followed him to a garage on the hillside, and we caught him as he came out. He was dressed only in a singlet and blue overalls, and his powerful arms were oiled. Had it not been for the steel chain I succeeded in twisting round his wrist he would have got away. He laughed when I asked where Ferrari was.

"I'll help you, señor," he said. "That fiend has taken my Concepcion with him. He had a launch waiting at Lyons and we came here down the river. He stopped at Tarascon and sent me on a fictitious errand. When I returned the launch had gone. By now he's joined the bandit Michaeli in the Corsican brush; and Tom Tom, the strangler, is with him. You'll have your hands full."

"Who is Tom Tom?" I asked.

"The Abyssinian you saw at Montmartre," the matador replied. "He was once head executioner in his land."

From Sevilliano we obtained photographs of Ferrari and Concepcion, and the Marseilles police gave us a chart of the negro sent by the Algerian authorities. A revenue boat landed us near Ajaccio the same night. A guide had been found who offered to take us to the Corsican's headquarters on condition that only Louys and I should go. He laughed when I suggested that a posse of gendarmes would be needed.

"If you are more than two, we shall never get within five miles of Michaeli. He has defied the police successfully for ten years. If you are wise you'll bargain with him, for he will never shelter a thief."

This seemed to be the opinion of the local officer also. It was evident he had a healthy respect for the bandit.

"As we sprang forward he raised a hand to his lips and collapsed limply against the wall."

WE MEET MICHAELI, THE BANDIT.

AFTER a short rest, we at once began our climb over gigantic boulders and through the dense undergrowth which the islanders term *la macchia*. A few hours of this arduous progress brought a sharp realization of the task which lay before us; already our feet were bruised and blistered and our clothes in shreds. Night had come before we reached the jagged hills surrounding Michaeli's retreat. Here our guide curtly ordered us to wait until he had spoken with the sentries. He slipped like a snake behind some rocks, and a minute later we heard a shrill whistle. Instantly burly forms appeared in every cleft and our eyes were dazzled by the beams from their electric torches. A harsh voice ordered us to hold our hands above our heads; and with the unpleasant pressure of gun-barrels in our backs we stood motionless whilst muscular hands searched our pockets for weapons. Fortunately, we had foreseen this and carried only small automatics fastened in the lining of our caps, which the bandits did not trouble to examine. A second whistle thereupon sounded and the redoubtable Michaeli stepped forward.

"You want Ferrari, I hear," he purred, in a soft but menacing voice. "He is not here. I have refused to admit him to my band, so go your ways."

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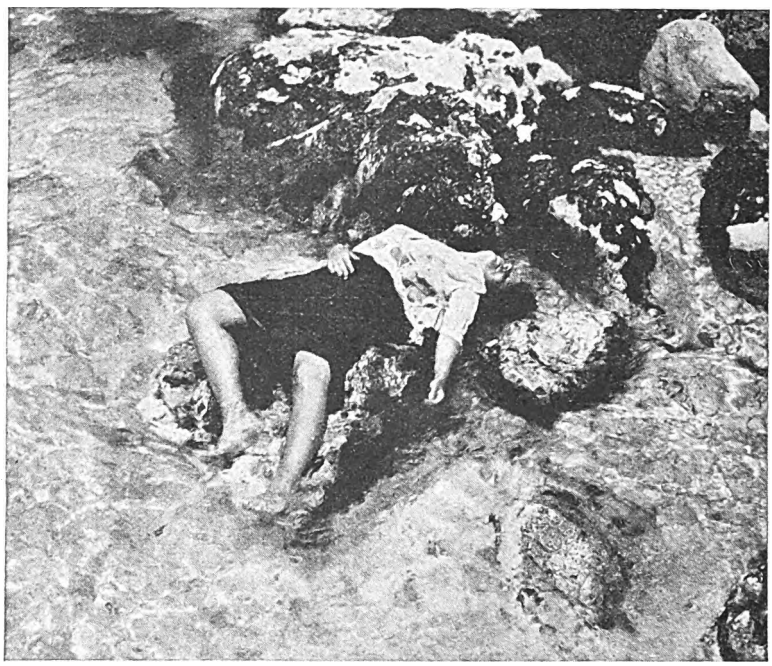
from rock to rock towards a long ruined shed which had attracted our attention. It was the only place from which no one had come, and smoke was issuing from the roof, an unusual thing at that hour.

On hands and knees, noiseless as Indians, we gained the rear of the building and peered through the broken, disjointed logs. Ferrari, shorn now of his long hair and beard, was crouching near a fire over which a pot was swung from a chain. Inch by inch we worked round to the front, until with a bound we were over the barrier of pine boards which had been fastened across the threshold. But he was too quick for us. As we sprang forward he raised a hand to his lips and collapsed limply against the wall. All our efforts to revive him were in vain. We never discovered what the drug was he had swallowed, but he died in a few minutes.



The body of Concepcion as it was found when washed up by the sea after she had been murdered by Tom Tom.

Louys remained on guard whilst I clambered down the steep road to the nearest police station. The officer listened to my story in silence, then he seized my sleeve and led me to a small sandy cove on the shore and pointed to a limp form flung by the waves against some boulders. It was the unfortunate girl who had betrayed Ferrari. She was quite dead and there was a crimson stain on her dress where a dagger had pierced her heart.

"It was the negro," the gendarme said. "We shot him this morning as he was trying to get away in a boat. He must have heard the girl tell you where Ferrari was hiding and followed her. We came on him just as he threw her body into the sea."

Weary and discouraged, we left Corsica the next day and returned to Paris.

Bertillon listened to my report with a wry face.

"We have very little evidence against the Spaniards and the girls," he said; "and Lebrun has not succeeded in analysing the stuff in those tubes yet. But we have recovered most of the stolen property, which was hidden in the leather factory. Well, we have broken up the gang, but it has not been a satisfactory investigation."

The two Spaniards were sent to Cayenne for life, but the girls only received light sentences.

(Next month: "The Devil's Telephone.")

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THE ALTAR OF HONOUR

By

ETHEL M. DELL

Illustrated by
HOWARD K. ELCOCK

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

GRIEF.

IT was the sort of party at which almost anything might have happened. It was Mrs. Deloraine's easy Irish way every Christmas to collect all the young folks who were anywhere within reach from seven years old upwards and throw them all into one huge *mêlée*, as it were, and leave them to enjoy themselves according to their various inclinations.

All the really little ones had elder sisters to take care of them, and so the little ones were very rarely left out in the cold. But some of the older children were not so fortunate, and inclined to hang about rather uneasily on the outside edge of things until vigorously roped in by Rory Donovan, whom nobody could resist. Rory was Mrs. Deloraine's nephew—a naval cadet of fifteen with as winning a pair of Irish eyes as anyone could hope to meet in a lifetime. Mrs. Deloraine's husband, whom everybody called Pat, had surnamed him "Daredevil" many years before, and Rory Daredevil he remained. Rory was the only person who took any trouble about the shy little outsiders.

Rory was never still except when asleep, and his movements possessed that lightning quality which defies all restraint. He had made up his mind that this party should be a success from everybody's point of view, and while Pat watched from a peaceful distance and his aunt played poker with much concentration in a curtained recess of the ball-room, he collected all the shy and awkward ones and paired them off to dance.

Then, for a moment's breathing-space, he paused, surveying the scene with his bright, bold eyes under their extremely black brows.

He wanted to be dancing himself, but actually he had no partner; and there was another child left out somewhere; he was quite sure of it—a dainty, fairy creature with golden hair, the rare golden hair that actually seems to give out light. He had marked her once from afar, standing shyly somewhere near the band; and he had thought to himself that he would leave her till the last as her hair had attracted him, and he would rather like her for a partner on his own account. But now she had disappeared, nor could he find her anywhere among the dancers or other merry-makers.

That was the worst of Glasmore, as well as its charm. The old place was full of hiding-places. Why, there were even secret passages—he knew of one that led down into the bowels of the earth and was said to come out somewhere on the shore.

Meantime, where was the golden-haired maiden who had looked so lonely and pathetic less than a quarter of an hour ago?

It seemed scarcely worth while to search the refreshment-room for the missing child, but he went to it nevertheless when he had exhausted every other probable hiding-place. There were several couples there, but of course she was not among them, and he was turning away, wondering whether he would extend his search to the upper regions, when his look fell upon a door at the farther end which led to a small conservatory. Here was a nook he had not searched!

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He went through the room like a streak of lightning, reached the open doorway, passed through it, and paused. The next moment he wheeled and very softly closed the door behind him. He had run his quarry to earth.

She was quite alone in the little, dimly-lighted place. There was no chair in it, but she had cleared a narrow space for herself on a low shelf between pots of flowering azaleas, and here she was sitting crouched, her hair covering her shoulders like a shimmering cloth of gold, her face hidden in her hands and resting upon her knees.

She was crying bitterly, with an abandonment which he was sure she would never have displayed voluntarily before a stranger. He stood, a step above her, hesitating. Then he moved down and reached her.

"I say!" he said. "I say!"

She started violently, and in a second her poor little distressed face was raised to his.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh!"

Her eyes shone through a veil of tears, true violet eyes with black brows, in startling contrast to a skin of dazzling fairness.

"Oh, don't be cross!" she said. "I couldn't help it! Truly—I couldn't."

"Cross!" said Rory. "I say, what ever are you crying for like this?"

She made hasty search for and found a minute lace handkerchief, quite inadequate for the occasion, with which she dabbed her eyes and nose with a guilty air.

"I know I shouldn't," she said apologetically. "It's—it's self-pity, isn't it? And I never do—as a rule—till I'm in bed. But I thought it would be safe—in here. I didn't mean to cry. I did try not. But it's like a big wave—growing and growing—till it bursts. And then I can't help it. I'm better afterwards."

"WHAT made you cry?" said Rory.

She shook her head, unable for the moment to speak. "It—was the band," she managed to say at length, with difficulty.

"The band?" he echoed in amazement.

"Don't you know," she said, "how sometimes, when you're unhappy, music makes you feel much worse?"

"Not when it's something jolly."

"It's the jolliness that does it," she said, with a sigh.

"I say, cheer up!" said Rory, feeling slightly beyond his depth.

"I am—cheering up," she assured him, with a fleeting smile. "I've nearly finished."

She heaved a long sigh that ended in a yawn. "I'm very tired," she said. "I wish I was in bed."

"It's quite early," said Rory.

"Yes, I know." Sadly she acquiesced. "I didn't want to come, but they made me."

"Who made you?" he questioned.

Now that her tears had ceased, she looked much older. There was, in fact, an expression in her eyes which is seldom seen in the eyes of a child—a kind of weary endurance in the midst of heartbreak—which moved him even more than her distress.

"My half-sister," she said, "and my father. They are always very vexed with me when I cry. They say it is—selfishness."

"And what is it really?" asked Rory.

Her lip quivered again. "It's—grief."

A light began to dawn upon him. "Oh, you've lost someone—someone you love," he said. "Not—not——"

She nodded, her eyes brimming anew. "Yes. My mother. How did you guess? Have you—lost yours?"

"Ages ago," he said. "Never mind about mine! I can't remember her even. Tell me about yours!"

She made a piteous effort to control herself. "They say I ought not to either—that it's absurd after so long. But how can I help it? And I wouldn't if I could! She was so beautiful, so lovely, and we—we were such—friends."

"I say," said Rory, "don't cry!"

She made a desperate effort to choke back the tears. "I've no one to talk to about her," she whispered. "They—they won't let me. Not that I want to—to them. But oh, I miss her so!"

"Don't cry!" Rory said. He put his arms all round her and held her very close. She lifted her face and kissed his neck.

"Thank you for being so very nice to me," she said. "No, I won't cry any more. Let's sit down, shall we? Then we shall only have been sitting out instead of dancing!"

Rory glanced downwards. There was room for only one. "Would you like to sit on my knee?" he said.

"Yes, please," she answered, with simplicity. "I'll try not to be very heavy." She slid her arm round his neck. "I like sitting like this. No one nurses me now. Do you think I'm an awful baby for twelve?"

"No," he said. "I like you."

"I like you too," she assured him. "I saw you a long while ago. I never thought you'd bother about me."

"Why, you're the only one here worth bothering about," said Rory.

"Oh, do you think so?" she said. "How nice!"

She breathed a sigh of satisfaction and leaned her golden head against his dark one.

"Look here!" said Rory. "I don't even know your name yet."

"Oh, don't you?" she said. "I know yours. You're Rory—Rory Daredevil, aren't you? My name is Charlotte Maynard Audley."

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"You're the old Colonel's daughter, are you?" he said. "And—and—your mother! Oh, yes, I remember now!"

"What do you remember?" she said.

He hesitated.

"Please tell me!" she urged, gently. "I like talking of her."

He still hesitated. "Well, I don't know much, after all. I saw her a year ago—riding to hounds—just before——"

"Just before she was killed," she whispered in a wrung voice. "She rode splendidly, didn't she? That day—the day she went over the cliff—they say she was—magnificent."

"Yes," Rory said. He tried to turn the subject. "Do you ever hunt?"

She suppressed a shudder. "Not now—no! They say I'm a coward not to want to."

"What rot!" said Rory.

"Yes, it really isn't quite cowardice," she said. "It's—a sort of horror. My father got angry one day and put me up on his biggest hunter. And—and—I fainted. They scolded me dreadfully afterwards. And then I cried rather badly, and they took me to Mrs. Dicker. She is very kind."

"What a brute your father must be!" observed Rory.

"Yes, he is rather," she admitted. "He didn't like my mother at all, nor did Griselda or Sylvia. And they don't like me because I'm like her."

"Fancy anyone not liking you!" said Rory. "What do they call you? Charlotte?"

She nodded sadly. "Yes, they do. But it isn't what mother called me."

"What is that?" asked Rory.

"She called me Charmaine," she said. "It's a mixture of the two names. Charlotte was my father's choice and Maynard was her name before she married. Father used to call me Charmaine once, but he never does now. The others never did."

"I shall call you Charmaine," said Rory.

"Oh, thank you," she said. "It really does belong to me."

"Yes," agreed Rory. "It really does. Why don't they use it—Griselda and the other one?"

"Because it was *her* name for me, I think," said Charmaine. "And they couldn't bear her. They turned my father against her, too. He never speaks of her now. But everyone else loved her," she added, with tender pride. "I heard Mrs. Dicker say once that she was 'a deal too popular with some folks,' and she didn't say it to please me. In fact, she was rather upset when she knew I'd heard—though I don't know why she should have been."

"Who is Mrs. Dicker?" asked Rory.

"She is our housekeeper at Malahide. Father keeps her because she doesn't cost much."

"I SEE," said Rory. "Your father lives at Malahide because he's poor, and your sisters too——"

"My half-sisters," she corrected, gently. "They are much older than I am. Griselda is thirty-four, older than my mother even."

"Oh!" said Rory. "Like that, was it? You poor kid! But they needn't take it out of you."

"I don't think they mean to," said Charmaine. "I'm a great nuisance, of course. Nobody wanted me, except mother, and she used to laugh and say that my greatest crime was that I wasn't a boy. I wish I had been, because then I should be at school instead of being taught by Griselda."

"Oh, she teaches you, does she?" said Rory. "Does she bully you?"

"She often scolds me," said Charmaine. "And if she thinks I'm being very naughty she sends me to bed, and then she comes and whips me with her riding-switch. It's only a little one, but it hurts a lot."

"Jove!" ejaculated Rory, in indignation. "Why don't you kick her—bite her?"

"I'm too afraid," said Charmaine. "I think she'd kill me."

"But why don't they send you to school?"

"You see," said Charmaine, "my father couldn't afford to send me to school and keep hunters as well. I should awfully like to go to school. But it's no use thinking about it till I'm sixteen, anyhow. Then I suppose I shall have to go somewhere to get finished."

"And you've got to go on being beaten and bullied till you're sixteen?" demanded Rory, in a voice that was nearly choked with wrath.

"I'm afraid so," said Charmaine.

"Is Griselda very ugly?" asked Rory, unexpectedly.

"Oh, very," said Charmaine.

"Then that's why!" he declared, furiously. "She's a beastly jealous old hag."

"Oh, but she isn't as old as that!" protested Charmaine. "She's hardly middle-aged. She couldn't possibly be jealous of me. Why should she be?"

"Why?" said Rory. "Because you're lovely and soft and young. That's why. And it's a damned shame, and I'll tell her so, if I get the chance!"

"Oh, you mustn't!" said Charmaine. "You really mustn't. Please promise me that you'll never do anything like that!"

She got up with the words, and stood before him with clasped hands.

"I'll do anything under the sun for you,

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Charmaine," he said. " You're the sweetest little thing I've ever seen."

" Oh, do you think so ? " she breathed, colouring in pleased surprise. " That's very nice of you. I wonder why ever you should think that ! "

" Think it ? " said Rory. " I know it." He got up abruptly, and stood facing her with a momentary awkwardness. " I'll be your friend if you'll let me," he said. " I'll stand by you through thick and thin."

" Oh, will you ? " she said. " Will you ? How nice ! But you won't—you won't—tell anyone, will you ? "

" I'll never do anything you don't like," he promised, and with the words suddenly, self-consciously, he pushed forward and kissed her on the cheek. " There, that settles it," he said. " Now we're chums. And I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll meet to-morrow down on the shore by Malahide Breakwater. It's ripping there at high tide."

Charmaine's eyes shone with a soft light. " Oh, I shall love that," she said.

CHAPTER II.

TALK.

" WELL, young Rory ! And how may you be feeling on the morning after the day before ? "

Pat Deloraine looked up comfortably from an ample plateful of ham and eggs as his visitor entered the room. His own contented countenance showed no signs of wear and tear. Pat was a born loafer, as pathetically harmless and inoffensive as a drone.

" I'm all right," said Rory. He turned from the sideboard with a plate in each hand, at sight of which Pat smiled.

" You're not doing yourself too badly this morning," he observed. " Any more than you did last night. I saw you were dancing all the last part of the time with the prettiest little colleen in the room."

Rory betrayed no embarrassment.

" She's English," he said. " Old Audley's youngest daughter from Malahide."

" She's a lovely child," said Pat ; " the very image of her mother, unluckily for her."

" Why do you say that ? " said Rory.

" I don't know. She was a bit on the rapid side, the mother. She galloped over the cliff, you know, a year ago, up Ballybeg way. There were a good many who thought it wasn't quite such an accident as it looked, for she was a superb rider."

" Great Scott ! " said Rory.

" Shouldn't mention that to the child if I were you," recommended Pat. " Not that you're very likely to see her again. Only came last night because your Aunt Eileen called her Cinderella in front of the two sisters. They can't stand chaff."

" It's a rotten shame ! " declared Rory, with heat. " What's she done to be treated like that ? "

" She ? Nothing, except get born when nobody wanted her," said Pat, " and have the effrontery to be pretty into the bargain. Old Audley's as poor as a church mouse, and to be saddled with a woman like Griselda for a daughter must be a bit of a handicap. There's some chance for the second one—Sylvia. She's quite passable. But Griselda—ye gods ! "

" Well, what's Griselda like ? " asked Rory, rapidly demolishing his breakfast. " She sounds a sort of she-dragon."

Pat chuckled. " She's a woman of iron, my boy, whom, I confess, I would not like to tackle single-handed—a great raw-boned creature, who strides about the place in riding-breeches. I bet the second Mrs. Audley had never seen her when she agreed to marry the old man."

Pat glanced up at the entrance of his wife, attired in a morning wrapper which trailed, somewhat depressingly, on the floor.

" Good morning, everybody ! " she said, in a weary drawl. " Don't talk to me ! I've got the very devil of a headache. Ah, Rory darlin', I wish you'd boil me an egg. Now, Pat, put away your paper like a dear boy, and make me the blackest cup of coffee that you've ever seen ! "

She subsided into a chair by the fire.

" Oh, Pat, dear," she resumed after a moment, " what do you think I did last night ? I found the letter I wrote asking the two elder Audleys and their father to come as well hadn't been sent at all. There it was under my jewel-case. I asked the little girl why they weren't with her, and she said she didn't know ; and then I forgot all about them till I went to bed, and then I found the letter. So vexing, because I hate having them, and I shouldn't have minded last night as they would have been lost in the crowd ! Now I shall have to ask them separately, which is such a bore. You see, I asked the little girl when I met them in the road, but I had a formal invitation for the elders.

" Well, Rory, boy, and how did you enjoy yourself ? I saw you dancing with Charmaine Audley once, and the child looked quite happy for a wonder."

" Once ! " grinned Pat. " Why, I never saw him dancing with anyone else the whole evening—made himself quite conspicuous, and her too. A good thing Griselda's eagle eye wasn't on her, or she'd have been clapped in irons by this morning ! "

" Oh, chuck it ! " said Rory.

" Burned with hot irons more likely,"

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supplemented his aunt. "I can't think what'll happen in another six years when that child grows up a brilliant beauty, as she will, and the wretched Griselda already getting more hideous every day. She'll make her pay with her life, just as she made the mother."

"I say, Eileen!" Even the easy-going Pat was momentarily shocked. "You'll get burnt yourself if you talk like that."

"Ah, sure now, Pat," she broke in, unperturbed. "Everyone knows that Verena Audley was driven to end her life in sheer desperation. Of course she couldn't stand her home, and of course she found distractions elsewhere! And, of course, she was bound to overstep the mark sooner or later—a lovely creature like that! Remember that young Overton? He was madly head over ears in love with her. Everybody knew it. Then there was that Rafferty man, too. He wasn't so obvious as young Overton, but he wasn't the sort to be kept at a distance for long. And there were heaps of others, too. Griselda knew it, as we all did, and just bided her time. Then, when she'd got her little adjustments ready, she snapped the spring and the mouse was caught. I don't blame poor Verena for taking the shortest way out; but I was always rather sorry for the mare. She was the finest jumper I've ever seen, and if Verena had only left her behind I'd have made a decent bid for her. She'd have carried my weight to perfection. And by the same token, Pat, did you tell Micky that I'd be riding the Jerusalem Artichoke this morning? You didn't? Well, will you go and tell him, please? Tell Micky to be round at eleven! No, I sha'n't want him, of course, but p'r'aps Rory would like to come. Would you, Rory?"

"Thanks very much, Aunt Eileen. I won't to-day if it's all the same to you."

"Why, what's the matter with the boy? I've never known you refuse a mount."

"He's got a previous engagement," grinned Pat. "That's about the size of it."

Rory's face was red, but he had himself under good control. "As a matter of fact, that is the size of it," he said. "Don't you worry about me, Aunt Eileen! I'm going to enjoy myself in my own way if nobody minds. I shall turn up for dinner to-night all right."

"Well, did you ever?" said Eileen. "I suppose it's human nature. You'd better get Biddy to put you up some grub, and p'r'aps you won't forget to eat it if you've got it with you. Pat darlin', would it be asking too much of yourself to come and ride with your wife for once? I've got to go and explain to the rest of the Audleys why they didn't get asked to my party."

She threw a glance at Rory as she made this announcement; then, as he betrayed no discomfiture, passed it on to her husband with a wink of some significance.

Pat broke into a laugh and departed.

CHAPTER III.

FRIENDS.

"YOU'RE very late," said Rory.

"I nearly didn't come," said Charmaine.

She stood before him on the windy shore, her golden hair streaming out from under a very shabby black velvet huntsman's cap.

"Why?" demanded Rory briefly.

She explained in her direct, childish way. "I made sure you would have forgotten, for one thing, and it was very difficult to get away, for another. Griselda thinks I'm staying in bed. You see, I thought she'd go hunting this morning, and then I could do what I liked. But she didn't, so I said I was tired and might I stay in bed. As soon as she said 'Yes,' I knew it was all right; because Mrs. Dicker looks after me when I stay in bed, and Griselda never bothers about me. She'd be furious if she knew."

"Well, you're here, anyway," Rory said, cheerily. "That's something. I hope Mrs. Dicker won't give you away."

"Oh, no, she won't." Charmaine began to brighten. "So long as I'm back in bed by tea-time, it's quite safe. It's one of Griselda's rules that if one is too tired to get up in the morning one must stay in bed all day."

"What rot!" said Rory.

"Yes, isn't it? But she never bothers before evening, so it's quite all right." Charmaine uttered a faint chuckle. "I'm very glad I came," she said. "Isn't it lovely? And what a wind!"

She turned towards the great breakers that were tumbling in with a deep roaring around the rocks. Rory stood beside her, watching her. The small, sweetly-modelled face held an attraction for him which he did not attempt to analyse.

When she turned to him again there was pleading in her eyes. "We won't go Ballybeg way, will we?" she said.

"Of course not!" said Rory. "I don't like Ballybeg either. Besides, it's miles away. It's much jollier round this side. Come and look at the caves!"

It was impossible to enter the caves while the tide was at its height, but they climbed as near as the dashing waves would allow, and presently found a ledge upon which they could sit and watch the swirling water below. The day was mild,

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and it was inclined to rain; but they were absorbed in each other.

"I can't think what made you so nice to me last night," Charmaine said. "Most boys hate girls that cry."

"Do you feel sad now?" asked Rory.

She shook her head. "Oh, no, not with you. I'm quite happy with you."

She glanced up with a fugitive smile, and Rory was immensely gratified.

"When's your birthday?" he asked, abruptly.

Her smile deepened. "The fifth of November, so I really ought to have been a boy, oughtn't I? When's yours?"

"Twenty-first of October—Trafalgar Day," said Rory. "I'm going into the Navy, you know."

"How lovely! I wish I was."

"You'd hate it," said Rory. "Fancy you roughing it! How you would hate it!"

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," declared Charmaine. "You think I'm very soft, but really I don't cry easily. That's one of the things that make Griselda so angry when she punishes me. She says I'm hardened. But I don't think pain is a thing to cry for, do you? It isn't like grief."

"What a rotten life you must lead!"

"Yes," she said, with a sigh. "But I'm used to it—almost. I suppose you've always been happy?"

"Oh, more or less," said Rory, with a masculine reluctance to admit complete contentment with his lot.

"You've got a father?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No. He's dead."

"Oh, Rory!" She laid a shy hand on his knee. "Don't say dead! I don't believe anybody's dead, do you?"

Rory stared a little. "What do you call it, then?"

She coloured and removed her hand, but he instantly caught it and brought it back to its resting-place.

"I don't quite know," she said, faltering. "Just—just not here, that's all."

He kept his hand on hers, as if he feared it might escape again. "I expect you're right," he said. "I'll be bound you're right. Come to think of it, people couldn't just fade out like a picture on a screen."

"Oh, I'm glad you feel like that, too," she said, eagerly. "It makes such a difference, because I've got no one to talk to about it. And you do really think that we go on and on and on—afterwards, do you?"

Rory hesitated; then, as her eyes besought him: "We must go somewhere, but I don't know where. I don't know anything about it," said Rory, his eyes on an immense wave riding in from the open sea.

Her look followed his. "Isn't it wonderful?" she said, in an awed voice. "And to think that, if one slipped into that, it would carry one right away—right away!"

Rory gave her a quick glance. "It would carry you away all right," he said. "But it would pound you to a pulp first." And then, swiftly, in a different tone: "Good heavens! It's got us!"

The great wave came surging up—a green wall of water edged with foam, most terrible, most amazing. No rock served to impede its progress. It swept irresistibly over a jagged point of cliff immediately below them, and reared up like a monster in a mighty column of spray. It seemed to Charmaine, shrinking back on her perch, that she was suddenly overwhelmed by a huge weight that burst upon her, suffocating her, dislodging her as though she had been a mere midget in the grip of a giant. There came to her a frightful sensation as of being sucked downwards into annihilation. And then—just as she was slipping over the verge—something stopped her. She hung as it were in space, poised on the very edge of eternity, until the power that held her back managed to assert itself. She found herself finally, desperately gasping for breath, but safe, crouched in a tiny cleft of the rock, with Rory almost lying upon her, his outstretched arms spread protectingly over her trembling body.

SHE raised herself, drenched from head to foot, her wet hair massed upon her shoulders. "How—how did you do it?" she said, wonderingly.

He answered with a certain grimness. "I just—hung on." And then, boyishly, "I say, let's get out of this! It's safer higher up. You're wet! Does it matter?"

She looked at him with eyes that shone like dark sapphires out of her pale face. "You are wet too," she said. "It was you that saved me. I was just—just gone."

"Rats! Rats! Rats!" cried Rory, laughing. "You couldn't have gone with me here. Or if you had, I'd have gone too."

"Yes," said Charmaine, and a flame of sheer devotion lit up those wonderful eyes of hers. "You would have gone too—when you needn't."

"Rats!" said Rory again.

She saw that he would have no more of the subject and she was too docile to attempt to pursue it further. They sat for a while longer, wet to the skin but too happy to notice.

"Some day," said Rory, "we'll go for a voyage together—that is, if you won't be afraid."

"Afraid!" she echoed. "With you!"

He laughed at her earnest attitude. "All right. We'll do it," he said.

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IT was more than an hour before the tide had receded far enough to permit them to descend to the shore; but the sky had begun to clear, and a fitful sun shone upon them. They scrambled down to the rocks, exploring the low caves and the pools with eager energy. And Rory told Charmaine of the smugglers' passage that led from the shore to one of the old cellars of Glasmore, so firing her enthusiasm that she searched for it without ceasing for the rest of the afternoon.

It was a vain search, however, and, as he pointed out to her, they could not have gone up it without matches or a lantern, and the daylight was beginning to fail. It was this last remark that recalled her.

"What time is it?" she said. "What ever can the time be?"

All her merry animation was merged into sudden fevered anxiety as she asked the question; but Rory carried no watch, and could judge only by the sun.

"Well, it must be close on four," he said. "Why, it doesn't matter, does it?"

"Oh, yes, it does matter!" she said. "I shall be caught unless I'm very quick. Good-bye!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Rory. "It can't be over yet! It can't be!"

"Yes, it is, it is!" she insisted, with nervous reiteration. "I can't stay any longer. I daren't. Good-bye!"

She was gone with the words, flying from him over the sand and rocks, towards the cliff that frowned, fortress-like, over the Malahide Breakwater.

He stood gazing after her, not attempting to follow, feeling as if something rather vital had been suddenly torn from him.

After a few moments he recovered his mental balance sufficiently to fling round on his heel and begin to walk in the opposite direction; but his gait was slow and aimless. It did not seem to matter where he went or what he did.

Suddenly he became aware of a movement behind him and swiftly turned. She was there again. Her arms were extended. She threw them impulsively around him.

"I was going away without thanking you," she panted. "I don't know how I could. And you have been so good to me. And you saved my life, too. I do thank you! I do—I do! Please kiss me and say good-bye!"

He hugged her instantly and kissed her hard and emphatically upon the lips.

"But must you go, I say?" he protested. "It's beastly, your going like this."

"I know—I know," she said, her voice trembling. "But I can't help it. I've got to go. But I just want you to know that I'll never forget you or that awful wave or any part of what you've done for me. Good-bye, dear, darling Rory! Good-bye!"

"We'll meet again," he said, detaining her. "We must meet again. See, I'll wait for you down here to-morrow!"

She was drawing herself from him; she suddenly clung to him again with a passionate closeness. "We may not meet again for a long time. I don't know. But anyhow, we'll always be friends after this, won't we? Always—always—friends! You don't forget your friends?"

"I'll never forget you, anyway."

"Nor I you," said Charmaine, with a sob. "Good-bye! Good-bye!"

She kissed him again and freed herself from him. When she was gone he nearly sprang to follow her, checking himself only with the reflection that of course they would meet again.

Yet the memory of their parting left a gloom in his mind which all his cheery philosophy did not avail to dispel. He went back to Glasmore with a strange heaviness at his heart.

CHAPTER IV.

RETRIBUTION.

MRS. DICKER got up to make up the fire, and cast an anxious eye at the clock. It was growing rapidly dark, and the rain was beating on the window-panes. The kettle was boiling cheerily, and a dainty meal stood all ready on a tray.

At the sound of the opening door, she turned stoutly round. "Oh, my dearie," she said, "where ever have you been?"—and then uttered a sort of choke and continued in another key: "Ah, it's you, Miss Griselda! And what a night to be sure! I was just saying to myself I wouldn't like to be out in it."

The woman who entered the housekeeper's room was tall and gaunt. She moved with the gait of a man. Her harsh features were rugged and forbidding, wholly lacking in kindliness.

She came up to the fireplace and looked down at Mrs. Dicker, her keen, dark eyes close-set on each side of a high, dominant nose. Her hands were long, supple, powerful.

"Is that Miss Charlotte's tea?" she asked in a deep, commanding voice.

"Yes, Miss Griselda. I was just going to make it and take it up to her."

"Make it, then! I will take it up."

Mrs. Dicker hesitated. "Well, I shouldn't wonder now if she's fast asleep. It would be a pity to wake her for it. Let me just run up and see first!"

She turned to the door, and Griselda, standing on the hearth—a grim and imposing personality—allowed her to reach it before she spoke.

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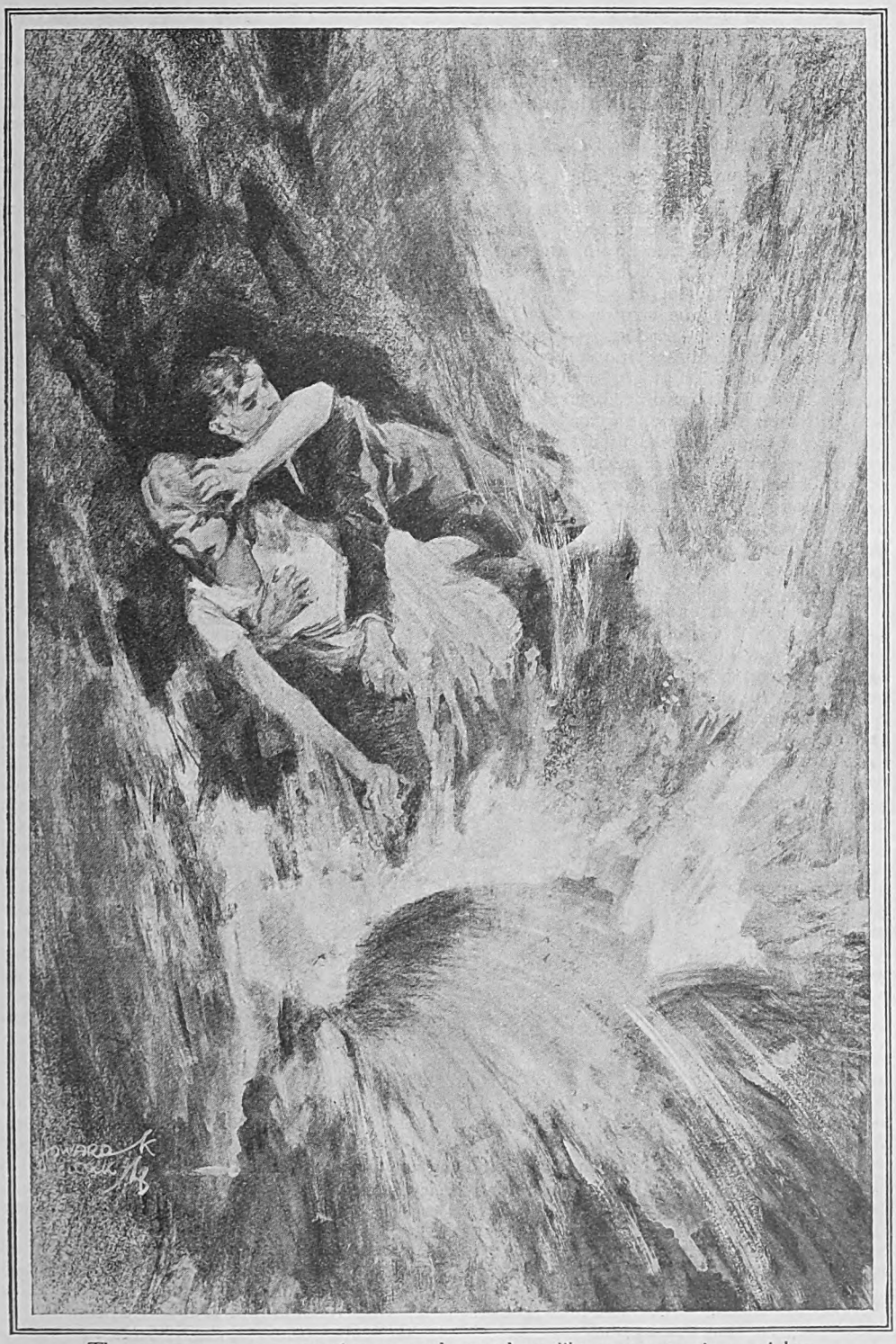

The great wave came surging up and reared up like a monster in a mighty column of spray.

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Then, "You needn't take that trouble, Mrs. Dicker," she said, without moving. "I heard what you said when I came in just now. And, as a matter of fact, I have already been up to Miss Charlotte's room. Where is she?"

"Oh, Miss Griselda!" Mrs. Dicker gasped. "Miss Griselda!"

"Well?" said Griselda.

"The pore lamb wanted a breath of air," Mrs. Dicker urged breathlessly, "and I thought as it couldn't do any harm, so I let her go out for a little. You'll not be vexed with her, Miss Griselda. It was but natural, and I couldn't see any harm in it."

"No? And you—evidently—do not see any harm in deceiving me either, or in encouraging the child to do the same? When Miss Charlotte returns you will send her straight to bed and let me know. And I forbid you to give her any refreshment of any kind. Is that quite understood?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Griselda, yes!" gasped Mrs. Dicker, tearfully. "But you won't——"

"Then be good enough to obey me!" Griselda said, and passed out of the room with her firm, unbending carriage, leaving Mrs. Dicker almost in a state of collapse.

Five minutes later the unlatched door was pushed softly open, and Charmaine, all flushed and wet with rain, peeped in.

"I'm afraid I'm late," she said. "But it's all right, I didn't meet anyone. Oh, Mrs. Dicker, what's the matter?"

For Mrs. Dicker was sitting in a low chair by the fire, crying into her apron.

Charmaine stole up to her. "What is it?"

"Oh, my dearie!" sobbed Mrs. Dicker. "It's all up! She knows!"

Charmaine turned very white. "Who? Griselda? Oh, never mind, Mrs. Dicker! It—doesn't matter."

"She's very angry, Miss Charmaine dear—in one of those still tempers of hers." Charmaine shivered. "And oh, my dearie, how wet you are! What ever have you been doing? You're to go to bed at once."

Charmaine was wet, drenched to the skin.

"It—doesn't matter," she said again. "I've had a wonderful day. She can't take that away, anyhow."

Mrs. Dicker bustled to her feet. "My dearie, you must come and undress at once, or you'll be ill. Come along—quick!"

Charmaine yielded to Mrs. Dicker's anxious insistence, and turned away from the cheery fire with a sigh. Tired out, she faced the fact that for that one perfect day payment must now be made.

Up in her room she submitted to Mrs. Dicker's ministrations, sometimes shivering in a sort of ague of suspense, sometimes too spent even to shiver.

"You ought to have a hot bath," said Mrs. Dicker. "But she said I was to put you straight to bed. I daren't do other."

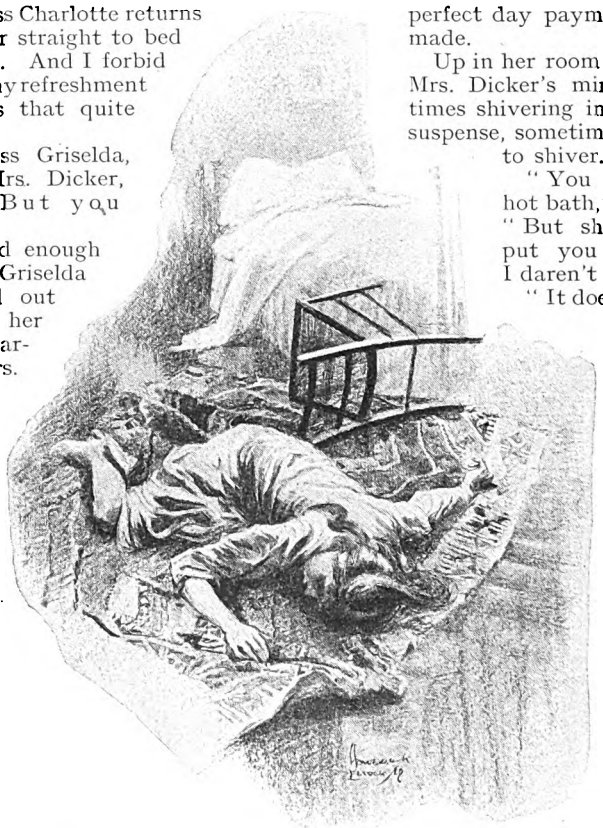
"It doesn't matter," said Charmaine.

But as she slipped between the sheets the shivering came again. She lay quaking in icy terror, and listening—listening for that firm, relentless step.

When it came at last, all power seemed to leave her. She could only lie and pant.

Griselda entered, and, turning, locked herself in.

"Charlotte," she said, "get up!"



Charmaine was left lying on the floor, bound in a kind of icy stupor.

Charmaine made a convulsive effort and raised herself. What she saw made her heart faint within her.

"Oh, Griselda, not that! Not that!"

Griselda came to the bedside. "What have you been doing to-day?" she said.

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"I've been down on the shore."

"Alone?" said Griselda.

"No," murmured Charmaine.

"And whom were you with?"

"I was with—with a boy called Rory," Charmaine faltered.

"Who is he?" pursued Griselda.

"A nephew—of Mrs. Deloraine's."

"Then I am right in supposing that you had arranged to meet him on the shore to-day when you professed to be too tired to get up this morning?" said Griselda.

"Yes," Charmaine admitted, tremulously.

"And what have you been doing all day?" Griselda's voice took a deep note that seemed to hold a menace. "Be careful how you answer me!" she said.

"We haven't been doing anything," whispered Charmaine piteously. "We only sat—and talked—while it was high tide, and afterwards looked at the caves."

"I see," said Griselda. "And after that you came home, hoping to get to bed before I could find out anything about it?"

"Yes," said Charmaine.

"You concocted a deliberate plot to deceive me," murmured Griselda.

"Yes," murmured Charmaine again.

"And why?" Again her voice went a little deeper, and Charmaine quailed.

"Because—because I knew you wouldn't let me go," she confessed faintly, "if you knew."

"I see," said Griselda. "Well, you have had your fun, and now you will take your punishment." She bent abruptly and stripped the bedclothes away from the little shrinking figure. "Get up!"

"Oh, no!" Charmaine gasped. "No! Griselda, please—please! Not this time! I'll never do it again, I promise. I'll always—always mind what you say. Oh, Griselda!"

The appeal was in vain. Griselda already grasped her with pitiless intention. "Yes," she said very grimly. "You will mind what I say after to-night. I am going to give you a lesson which will make you mind—once and for all."

She had a man's strength, and there was no resisting her. The thin, supple switch she carried had no weight, but it had a scorpion's sting, and she knew exactly how to wield it with most effect. The punishment she inflicted was merciless and protracted far beyond the breaking-point of the childish endurance opposed to it, and no wrung outcries or anguished tears availed to lessen its severity. Her authority had been set at naught with intolerable effrontery, and she was determined finally to subdue the spirit that had dared thus to defy it.

When she stayed her hand at length she had wreaked upon Charmaine's quivering body the full force of her wrath. And Charmaine was like a shattered thing.

She slid down upon the floor and lay there, convulsed with bitter sobbing, while Griselda stood over her, erect and commanding, and pronounced judgment.

"For the future," she said, "you will never go outside the gates without my permission, and as to this boy whom you have been meeting in secret, I forbid you most emphatically ever to see or hold any communication with him again. I am absolutely shocked by your behaviour in this respect, and I can only put it down to the taint of heredity."

She turned with the words and left her lying on the floor in complete darkness, and there during many hours she lay, bound in a kind of icy stupor.

When Mrs. Dicker unlocked the door at last on the following morning, she discovered Charmaine sitting up in bed with flushed cheeks and eyes that burned with fever.

"Oh, Mrs. Dicker," she said, between short, hard gasps. "I've had—such a wonderful dream. I thought—I fell into the sea. And it was high tide—and Rory was there too—and it carried us both right away. Why wasn't it true, Mrs. Dicker? Why, oh, why are all the nice things—always dreams?" And then, with a little cry, she put her hand to her side. "Oh, there's something hurting me—where I breathe!" she said. "Do you think I'm going to die soon? I hope—I hope I am!"

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE INCUBUS.

"IT'S the devil!" said old Colonel Audley, pulling irritably at his moustache. "I can't keep pace with things. Something's got to be cut out. The question is what?" He made an angry gesture towards the correspondence beside his breakfast-plate. "It's getting worse."

"I thought you said when Sylvia got married last year that it would make all the difference," observed Griselda.

"I was a damn' fool if I did," said Colonel Audley. "We'll have to throw out something else now to lighten the boat—I can tell you that—or give up altogether."

Griselda was silent. She had finished her breakfast, and now leaned back in her chair—a large woman of imposing presence, with iron-grey hair, attired in riding-dress.

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Griselda at forty possessed a personality with which few people cared to try conclusions. She ruled her father's household with a rod of iron.

Old Colonel Audley fumed on. He hated Griselda, although in a fashion she suited him. "Here am I dumped down in this forsaken hole for the sake of being in a hunting-country. Why the devil I let myself be persuaded to leave Ireland, I don't know. Well, you'll suffer for it, that's all. What you have now, you can't have afterwards. It'll end in your having to work for your living, my girl, and I hope you'll enjoy it."

"That," said Griselda, "I am doing now."

It had been at her instigation that they had given up their Irish home five years before, and it did not interest her to know that her father had never ceased to regret the move. It was by her arrangement also that they had settled down in this dreary little village in the Wolds, where everything had been sacrificed to enable them to hold their own in the English hunting set in which her younger sister Sylvia had ultimately found a husband. It was no part of Griselda's plan to find herself compelled ultimately, when youth was past, to earn her own living. She considered, not wholly without justice, that she had done a certain amount of useful work in running her father's establishment. There was no doubt that with Griselda as its head they had succeeded in attaining a position in the county to which otherwise they had scarcely aspired. But for this fact Sylvia's marriage to Sir Bentleigh Merrion had certainly never taken place.

She personally had discarded all ideas of matrimony long since.

Her father's hints and threats with regard to the future had of late begun to disturb her somewhat in spite of her determination not to be unduly alarmed. It was difficult to see how further economies could be effected.

"I have no intention of panicking," she remarked. "There is a remedy for everything. If things have really got so much worse lately, we must find an expedient."

Colonel Audley got up with a movement of exasperation. "Well, you'd better be quick about it," he said. "My pension dies with me, remember, and the little I shall manage to leave behind won't come to much when it's divided by *two*."

A cold gleam shone in Griselda's hard eyes at this taunt. "Is that what you have done?" she said.

"Yes, it is!" he rapped out, savagely. "What else did you expect? Think I was going to leave the child entirely unprovided for—though, Heaven knows"—he uttered an angry laugh—"I may yet. Half of nothing may be her portion—and yours."

"You mean," Griselda said, in a strictly level tone, "that you have treated Charlotte in your will exactly as you have me?"

"What else could I do?" he demanded.

"I think," she said, in even tones, "that I proved to you a good many years ago that Charlotte was not entitled to be treated as one of the family."

"No, you never proved that," he said. "It is still an open question—always will be."

"There was no question as to her mother being—an adulteress."

"Damn it! You don't mince matters."

"No, I don't," said Griselda. "It is not my way. I repeat that Charlotte herself has no moral claim upon you and never ought to have been born."

"Well, I can't help that! She was born, and, whether she's entitled to it or not, she has been called by my name all these years, and I can't in common fairness repudiate her at this stage."

"That," said Griselda, "I admit. But I dispute your right to make her a joint inheritor with me of your property."

"Damn it!" he said, "I own it's a pity she ever lived to grow up. But she's young, anyhow, and ought to be healthy enough. Why don't you make her do something for her living?"

"She has no brains," said Griselda. "She will never do anything useful."

"If girls can't support themselves, they ought to marry," said Colonel Audley. "It's what Sylvia did."

"Marry!" said Griselda.

"Well, how old is she?"

"Seventeen last November," said Griselda.

"Just the right age!" declared Colonel Audley. "Well, why don't you make Sylvia do something useful for once—give her a season in town? She's got looks of a sort. Some fool is sure to want her, and then she'll be off our hands, anyway."

"It seems a preposterous idea and she'd probably go wrong," said Griselda, but she spoke as though considering the matter.

HER father was quick to note the fact and to see his chance. "Oh, we've got to risk something," he said. "Sylvia must see to that. She's all white innocence and that sort of thing—the very type to attract some rich ass who is fed up with the other kind. And if she does—by Jove, I'll alter my will in your favour."

"I can certainly make Sylvia have her for a time," said Griselda coldly. "But if she goes, I must have another servant in the house. Mrs. Dicker can't do everything."

"Oh, you can easily get a girl from the

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village to come in and do all that Charlotte does. We'll manage that all right. And it'll be a load off my mind as well. Come, come, we must fix this up directly."

"It will cost you some money, which will most likely be completely wasted," Griselda observed. "She has no clothes that she could possibly wear in London, nor are they to be bought in this neighbourhood."

"Oh, damn!" Colonel Audley's face lengthened considerably. "Can't Sylvia see to all that? Tell her I'm bankrupt and can't afford it! After all, I gave her a decent outfit when she married, so she owes me something."

"I'll put that to her," said Griselda ironically. "It wouldn't greatly surprise me if she took to the idea without much persuasion. Bentleigh is not an exciting partner, and she may be glad of an excuse for a little extra amusement. Besides" —again supreme contempt was in her voice —"I believe she rather likes Charlotte."

"It's a good thing someone does," said Colonel Audley, in a tone of relief. "If she wasn't such a hopeless little coward, I should be sorry for her."

"And it would be a waste of time," said Griselda, calmly. "Charlotte has no brains, as I told you before. And ever since that youthful escapade of hers five years ago, before her illness, she has never dared to show any vice."

"Perhaps she hasn't got any."

"She certainly had," said Griselda. "But I think I managed to stamp it out."

"Yes, she nearly pegged out that time, didn't she? Your stamping out was a bit drastic, eh, Griselda?"

Griselda smiled sarcastically. "A little salutary punishment does not induce a touch of pleurisy and subsequent heart trouble. I have never regretted giving her that lesson. She has never disobeyed or attempted to deceive me since. I think that is on the whole an achievement to be rather proud of."

Colonel Audley broke into a laugh and turned away. "A matter of opinion!" he observed, enigmatically.

But Griselda merely laughed also, with intense scorn, and lighted a cigarette.

CHAPTER II.

THE EXPEDIENT.

"I'M tired, Mrs. Dicker," said Charmaine. She sat bent in her chair, frowning over a long darn in a table-cloth while Mrs. Dicker ironed at the kitchen table. Her beautiful hair hung over her shoulder in one long shining plait of vivid gold which contrasted strongly with the flower-like whiteness of her skin. There was no colour whatever about Charmaine, save in her hair and the pansy-purple of her eyes.

"Leave it for me, my dearie!" said Mrs. Dicker. "I'll do it presently."

"Oh, no," Charmaine said. "Griselda told me to get it done before I did anything else. If I hadn't dawdled I should have finished it yesterday."

"As if you ever dawdled!"

"Oh, yes, I do sometimes," said Charmaine, with a sigh. "It's very difficult not to, I think, when there's always something else waiting to be done."

She did not speak in any tone of complaint, but wearily, spiritlessly.

Mrs. Dicker made a sympathetic sound. The sight of the slender bowed figure vexed her motherly soul, but she knew there was no remedy. Griselda had decreed that Charmaine should work, since she was too stupid to learn. There was always plenty to be done, and, with all the goodwill in the world, Mrs. Dicker could not shoulder everything. It was only her love for the child, fostered by a long and desperate illness through which her devotion alone had brought Charmaine, that kept Mrs. Dicker there.

"The pore lamb's got no one but me to turn to," she would say to Tim Kelly, the groom, in moments of expansion; and Tim, who for purposes of his own had also accompanied the family from Malahide, would agree with a pitying grin. He had no very high opinion of Charmaine on account of her nervous dread of horses, but he was broad-minded enough to admit that it was Miss Griselda's fault that she was so poor-spirited.

"And what have you got to do when that's finished?" asked Mrs. Dicker.

"I'm to wash all the china in the drawing-room," said Charmaine.

"Well, it takes hours to do," said Mrs. Dicker. "You'll never get through it to-day if you stop to finish that first."

"I must—somehow," said Charmaine.

The sudden ringing of a bell made her start violently.

"All right," said Mrs. Dicker, setting down her iron. "I'll go."

Charmaine listened intently until Mrs. Dicker's returning footsteps were audible.

Mrs. Dicker nodded at her as she entered. "Yes, she wants you, my dearie. Run along quick sharp, or there'll be trouble!"

Charmaine was on her feet in a moment. "Oh! is she angry? What is it?"

"No, no, child. She's the same as usual. Don't get so scared," said Mrs. Dicker. "You've done nothing to be ashamed of."

It was true. But Charmaine had been made to cringe too often to be capable of displaying any remnants of self-respect in

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Griselda's presence, even if they existed. She went to obey the summons with breathless rapidity.

"Don't come in like a whirlwind!" said Griselda coldly, from her chair before her bureau. "Close the door and come here!"

Charmaine obeyed with a care that would have seemed exaggerated in anyone else.

"Now," said Griselda, bestowing upon her a searching and intent scrutiny which lasted until she began to tremble, "tell me—first of all—why you have not carried out my orders with regard to the china."

"I'm going to do it," whispered Charmaine. "I—I'm just finishing the tablecloth you gave me to do first."

"Yes," said Griselda. "You leave one day's work to be finished the next, with the result that nothing is ever properly done. Now listen, Charlotte! When I give you a task it is to be done on that day and no other, and you will not leave it until it is done. I have said this to you before. How is it that I have to repeat it?"

Charmaine was silent.

"Answer me!" said Griselda.

Charmaine swallowed and found her voice. "I'm very sorry, Griselda. I wasn't feeling very well yesterday. I had a sideache, and — and Mrs. Dicker sent me to bed early."

"I should be very much obliged to Mrs. Dicker if she would kindly mind her own business," said Griselda. "Since when, pray, have Mrs. Dicker's orders taken precedence over mine?"

"Oh, they didn't—they haven't!" gasped Charmaine in a quivering tumult of agitation. "Please don't think that! Please—please don't! It was my fault. My side was hurting me. It comes on sometimes at night, and I can't help it. I'm very, very sorry. I'll get everything done today."

"Stand still!" commanded Griselda. "Let me hear no more of this hysterical rubbish! You do nothing but fuss over every little ache until you are becoming positively hypochondriacal. There is nothing whatever the matter with you, and you would be a normal healthy girl if you didn't give way to these absurd fancies. Now for another matter! Since you never go near the hunting-field, of course you get no opportunity of meeting anyone worth knowing or entering any kind of society, and this accounts to a large extent for your being so childish and awkward for your age. Do stand up, Charlotte, and stop fidgeting! You have the most annoying habits. You cringe like a dog that expects

to be beaten, and yet I've never whipped you since you were twelve years old. For goodness' sake pull yourself together and have a little sense! You really are the most extraordinary girl. I'm not angry with you. I

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have never been unjust to you in your life. And yet you behave in this insane fashion whenever I speak to you."

Charmaine was shaking all over. Great tears welled up in her eyes and overflowed. She shrank from Griselda's pitiless regard in open distress. "I can't help it!" she sobbed. "I can't!"

"I think you ought to see a brain specialist," said Griselda, still surveying her critically. "You stand and cry, and can't say what you're crying for. Get out your handkerchief and dry your eyes—at once!"

The familiar deep note made itself heard in her voice, and Charmaine responded instantly, choking back her tears with frantic effort.

"That's better," said Griselda. "Now don't be so silly again, or I shall have to punish you. What I sent for you to say was that Sylvia has been good enough to offer to have you for a season in town. I'm sure I don't know what sort of mess you'll make of it, but there it is. You'll have to do the best you can—get married if possible; for I honestly don't feel that I can do much longer with your unwholesome moods and fancies here. Well? What are you looking like that for?"

Charmaine's tears were gone. She was standing wide-eyed, with arrested breath, a great flood of colour sweeping over her delicate face.

"Oh, Griselda!" she gasped. "You—you—do you mean it?"

"The little I shall manage to leave behind me won't come to much when it's divided by *two*." A cold gleam shone in Griselda's hard eyes at this taunt.

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"Oh, don't gibber!" said Griselda irritably. "And don't ask idiotic questions! I always mean what I say. And that brings me to one thing more—the most important of all. We have decided to give you this chance because you never have fitted into this household, and the sooner you can find yourself another niche the better. You will have to work for your living eventually if you don't, or—more probably—go to the workhouse. But let me warn you very solemnly, Charlotte, against misusing it! You needn't gape at me like that. You are not your mother's daughter for nothing, and you know very well what I mean. If you ever do anything to bring shame upon our family name, you had better never let me see your face again; for if you do, you will get such punishment as will make you wish that you had never been born."

She uttered the words with a grimness of purpose that rang through the room almost like a death-sentence.

"You understand me?" said Griselda.

The colour had all gone again from Charmaine's face. She answered very faintly. "Oh, yes, indeed—indeed I won't do anything to disgrace you!"

"You had better not," said Griselda. "Now you can go. And do try to have a little sense, or you'll be the laughing-stock of the town! You probably will be as it is."

"Oh, I will try," said Charmaine, and, slipping out, fled like a rabbit to its burrow.

BACK in the kitchen and panting with haste and excitement, she imparted the amazing news to Mrs. Dicker in quivering tones that were scarcely expressive of joy at the prospect before her.

Mrs. Dicker, however, was delighted on her behalf. "Well, that is a surprise!" she declared. "I never thought Miss Griselda would have done anything so nice. Why, my dearie, what's the matter? Aren't you pleased about it? Why, I do believe you've been crying!"

"Oh, that's nothing—nothing!" declared Charmaine. "Griselda was rather vexed and scolded me about the china. But I'm all right again now."

"But you aren't pleased as you ought to be," said Mrs. Dicker, regarding her with fond solicitude. "What else did she say to you?"

"Not much," said Charmaine. "Only that I was stupid, and that people would laugh at me if I didn't behave more sensibly."

"What nonsense!" said Mrs. Dicker, proudly. "What next, I wonder? You're as pretty as a rose, my dearie, and nobody's going to laugh at you. They'll love you."

Charmaine sighed. "I don't see how they can. I'm so dreadfully afraid of people I don't know—the people Griselda likes. I get so frightened sometimes I can hardly speak."

"Oh, you wait!" said Mrs. Dicker, with consoling reassurance. "People aren't like you think they are. You get on all right with Miss Sylvia—I beg her pardon—her ladyship, you know."

"Yes, Sylvia is never unkind to me," said Charmaine.

"Then don't you worry, my dear!" said Mrs. Dicker. "You'll have the time of your life. Why, I shouldn't wonder but what you might go and pick up some nice young gentleman and get married before you know where you are."

Charmaine had returned to her darning. "That's what Griselda is hoping for," she said in a muffled voice. "But no one could ever possibly want to marry me, and I would never dare to get married either—unless it was to someone like dear Rory Daredevil, who was so kind to me five years ago."

"How you do remember him!" commented Mrs. Dicker. "Fancy, after all these years! For you've never seen him since. We moved over here directly you got better."

"I know," said Charmaine sadly. "I don't suppose I ever shall see him again, Mrs. Dicker. But I shall go on dreaming about him always. He was the sort of person one never could forget."

"Dearie me!" said Mrs. Dicker. "Well, well, let's hope you will find someone like him, then! But don't you go for any of them flighty ones, Miss Charmaine dear! They'll only lead you into trouble."

"Is that what Griselda meant?" said Charmaine suddenly.

"Eh, dearie?" questioned Mrs. Dicker.

"Is that what Griselda meant?" repeated Charmaine. "She said I wasn't to misuse my chance or bring shame upon the family. She said that, being my mother's daughter, I should understand. But I didn't. Mrs. Dicker"—her eyes were lifted now, eyes of deepest, purest innocence—"what did she mean when she said that? Did my mummy ever do anything to—to disgrace them?"

Mrs. Dicker had just taken a fresh iron from the stove. She dropped it on the table abruptly as if it had burnt her, then as quickly snatched it up again and put it back with a clatter on the stove.

"What's the matter?" said Charmaine. "What's the matter, Mrs. Dicker?"

And Mrs. Dicker, with her back turned, answered reassuringly, but in a voice that was oddly shaken, "Oh, never you mind, my dear! Don't talk to me! I can't get the dratted thing right nohow this morning."

Charmaine, with her instinctive obedience, asked no more.

(To be continued.)

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Nothing Ever Happens

By STACY AUMONIER

Illustrated by
S. BRIAULT

I.

BENEATH the glow of the green lamp the doctor's face appeared drawn and troubled. Nine-thirty-five p.m. Not an unduly late hour, you may say, but to a man called up twice in the night, and working under extreme pressure from the moment of rising soon after seven—snatching meals when and where he could—the day had been sufficiently exhausting. He was apt not to realize it until it was over. Dr. John Clay looked around that bleak consulting-room and pondered. The room had once been a stables, quite unconnected with the house; it was his predecessor who had converted it into a consulting-room, and linked it to the doctor's house by means of a narrow strip of passage running between the outer wall of a mews and the disused yard of a wharf. It seemed impossible to eradicate the desolate air of this remote building; and on this December night, with gusts of fog from the river for ever penetrating through any aperture that could be found, it was at its most depressing. One side of the consulting-room also backed on to the disused yard of the wharf. The other faced about twenty yards of gravel, illumined by a not too powerful red lamp, on which was painted in black, "Surgery." At the end of this gravel stretch was Thrilby Street, one of the most sordid and unwholesome streets in Bermondsey. It cannot be said this entrance was attractive or even easy to find, but the inhabitants of Thrilby Street, always quarrelling, fighting, and damaging each other, or drinking themselves into various stages of coma or madness, knew their way to Dr. Clay's bell as well as they did to their own homes.

Dr. Clay was a young man, just entering his twenty-ninth year. In spite of his sleepless nights, his long strenuous hours, his sordid surroundings, he loved his work. He could never quite get over the miracle of finding himself moving amongst people, *doing them good*. Their curious childlike faith in him stimulated his powers. He had soon discovered the extreme value of the personal equation. Without belittling or failing to avail himself of the assured discoveries of medical science, he was not at times above exploiting the fetish. To patients with imaginary ailments—a large company—he not infrequently administered imaginary cures. And the practice worked admirably. A bottle of some perfectly innocuous liquid would keep them entertained for weeks at a time, and they would come to him with tears of gratitude in their eyes. On the other hand, if he told them there was nothing amiss with them, they would, he knew, go away disgruntled and invariably seek another doctor, or probably get into the hands of a quack. In many cases of genuine malady he discovered that the power of his own personality could be of a direct psychological benefit to the patient. Immersed in these physico-psychological experiments, he found his work not merely interesting but absorbing.

And yet he was tired, utterly tired. On this depressing evening he was aware that the nervous system which controlled his strong frame had of late been grievously jagged by affairs unconnected, or only partially connected, with his work. He

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was avid for sympathy and for some kind of human understanding, anxious to share the hopes and disappointments of his experiments. And where the jar had come had been from that quarter where but two years ago he had set such high hopes—his wife.

Aimée was bored, frankly and utterly bored. She hated Bermondsey. She hated the sordid surroundings, the shabby Victorian house. The ever-pervading smell of ether and chemicals that seemed like an aura around her husband and his *ménage* disgusted her. She hated, moreover, what she called "the filthy people." And the tragedy was that she too had launched on this marital venture with the highest of hopes.

Aimée was six years younger than the doctor, and she came from Brighton. She was fair, pretty, and of a naturally gay disposition. She was one of a large family. Her father, who owned a small preparatory school for the sons of gentlemen, lived in a state of constant anxiety, struggling with his own attacks of asthma—with which the winds of Brighton played havoc in the winter—and the unending problem of bringing up seven healthy and socially ambitious children on an income that seldom exceeded six hundred pounds a year. When, therefore, one November evening, a good-looking young doctor, who was attending a medical conference at Brighton, was brought to the house by a mutual friend, and began almost immediately to set his cap at the second daughter, you may rest assured that no obstacles were put in his way. It was, as those things go, obviously a case of mutual love at first sight. The doctor, who had been working hard for a long time and devoting his whole mind to grim scientific matters, reacted to this sudden vision of buoyant youth and irresponsible femininity. Aimée, who had been tiring a little of the social frivolities of Brighton, and trained since adolescence to keep a weather eye on the marriage market, was immediately attracted by the solid potentialities and—to her—the unusual character of her lover. A doctor's wife! There was something alluring in the projected position. There were a great number of doctors in Brighton. They resided mostly in the big squares, with a large brass plate on their front doors, and a luxurious limousine waiting outside to take them on their rounds.

In Aimée's set a doctor's wife was a person of some consequence, and she—she was only twenty-one! If it was like this in Brighton, what would it be like in London? London! It had been the dream of her young life to live in London.

John told her he had just bought a practice in a poor district, and when he poured out all his ideals and hopes and aspirations, she listened with only faintly discerning interest. When he spoke of a poor district she imagined it as some place he would visit every day. She—she would be in London, and there would of course be the limousine, and Regent Street, Piccadilly, the theatres, the swell restaurants, dancing and night clubs. There would be a whirl of social life—a doctor's wife! She even imagined herself assisting him in some vague way. Calling on dear old lady patients, taking them jellies and bunches of grapes. She sometimes even wondered how she would look in a nurse's cap and gown.

AND then he had married her and taken her to live in the heart of Bermondsey! And there was no limousine, only a shaky little two-seater, which he had to have for his extensive and rambling practice. Dr. John Clay knew all this. Leaning forward on his hands under the light of the green lamp, he blamed himself more than he did her. What else could he have expected? After the blow of her first realization of disappointment she had made some kind of attempt to adapt herself to this new life. She tried abstractedly to understand his point of view. But it all came back to the argument: Of course, he was doing a lot of good and all that, but why not do it in the West-end among clean and respectable people? She was repelled by the sight of pain and suffering. She felt hopelessly self-conscious in the presence of the poor. That awful night-bell was an eternal torture to her.

She had introductions to a few people in the West-end, and these she soon began to visit, and to enlarge the circle of her acquaintanceships. Before two years were up she was spending more of her days in the West-end than in the East. She was always at luncheons and dinner parties, theatres and dances. The car of some young man seemed invariably to be at her door. On occasions when the doctor met these attendant swains (they would sometimes deign to come and lunch in Bermondsey), they, in the society of his wife, would make him feel not only old, but terribly old-fashioned. They had a vernacular of their own which Aimée spoke, but which he found difficult to follow. They all, of course, danced, played bridge and golf, attended the latest revues and cabarets. They hummed jazz tunes, used words and expressions he had never heard. What annoyed the doctor was that they always talked as though they assumed that he of course knew what they were talking about. And when he sometimes bluntly showed he didn't, he was conscious of their contempt and of Aimée's shame at his ignorance.

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a separate bedroom. It had reached a climax. She said she couldn't stand that night-bell any longer. Aimée had that day made the change, and moved all her things into the spare room. Now it was not so much this action which had annoyed John Clay; it was the way it was conducted. She flung it at him almost as though it were a punishment, as though he and he alone were responsible for the jarring night sounds. Not a word of sympathy that *he* had to go out into the bitter nights, no apologies, hardly an explanation. And when he had uttered a few words of protest, she had flown into one of her noisy sarcastic moods. Aimée never wept, but she had a way of declaiming her sentences bitingly and venomously, over-emphasizing such statements as: "Of course it didn't matter about *her!* *She* didn't count," and then she would wind up the diatribe by humming in a kind of high falsetto the phrase of some popular song. It came home to him at those moments that his beloved Aimée was being "common." There were insurmountable barriers between them. To-night she had flounced out of the room on one of these falsetto phrases, ostentatiously, before he had finished his coffee. He heard her banging about in the rooms above. For a moment he felt like going upstairs and shaking her, but, biting his lips, he went back to his work. How small and foolish it all seemed! And now it was time to go back. Should he go to her, apologize, and try to make it up? It struck him at that moment as a tragedy that Aimée had no apparent faculty for tears. How much simpler these marital trials must be when the woman worked herself up into a passion that ended in a paroxysm of tears! Then you threw your arms around her, and kissed her, and she sobbed on your bosom until the storm subsided. Then you clung to each other in the darkness, and the bonds of your intimacy seemed, if anything, strengthened by the regrettable outburst. But he had never known Aimée to weep. She rustled down these corridors of domestic infelicity, slamming the doors behind her, humming in her cold pellucid voice snatches of those absurd toneless songs. What would she be doing when he got back? Probably lying on the Chesterfield in front of the fire, the Sealyham puppy in her lap, reading a novel, smoking a cigarette, and listening to the gramophone. That in itself always seemed to him a strange faculty, to be able to read and listen to a gramophone at the same time! He sometimes thought that the reason of the combination was that it relieved her of any effort of concentration in either direction.

He sighed, and was about to turn out the lamp when there came a long, urgent-sounding ring at the consulting-room bell.

II.

AT that identical moment Aimée was in the little yellow drawing-room. But she was neither reading nor listening to the gramophone. She was listening to a young man with eyes that somewhat resembled the Sealyham's. He was saying:—

"Oh, do chuck it all, and come with us, old thing."

She noticed how careful he was to emphasize the "us." She looked into the fire and replied:—

"Oh, Geoffrey, I'm so fed-up. It's so dull—dull—nothing ever happens here at all."

The young man was sitting on the floor at her feet. He rested one hand on her knees and with the other playfully gripped her ankle.

"Listen, darling. I've got the little bus outside. In half an hour we can be at Wanda's. You can spend the night with her. She'd love it. There are five of us going to-morrow morning—safety in numbers, you know!—Wanda, the Stribes, and Archie Binstead, and me. Sheila was coming, but she's fallen through. You can have her reserve on the Blue train to-morrow night. Think of it, away from all this filthy fog, darkness, dirt, squalor, and stink of dirty people! And you wake up in the morning and there is the blue sky, and the sun, and the mountains, and such a sea you can hardly imagine. And you go to your hotel and wash and change. And then we all sit out or stroll along the terrace in the sun, listening to a wandering troupe of gipsy musicians."

She watched the eager glow in his eyes, and she was innately aware that his eagerness and hunger were not entirely confined to the scenes he was trying to depict. His eyes were devouring her. Subtly aware of some faint perfume—was it on his hair or his handkerchief?—he seemed to bring into that drab room the exotic call of Southern skies. The fact that his father had been a Holborn draper did nothing to detract from it, for his father had left Geoffrey a considerable fortune, and it was his proud boast that he did not know the difference between cotton and silk. What Geoffrey did know was a little problematical, beyond the fact that women were attractive, and that all the pleasures of life could be bought with money.

Aimée heaved a deep sigh, and passed her hand through his hair.

"Oh, Geoffrey," she whispered, "I wish you wouldn't be so beastly—persuasive."

The doctor would have been astounded to see that there were tears in her eyes.

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III.

IT was an old-fashioned system by which the door of the consulting-room was opened by the doctor pulling a catch on the wall by his desk. String played an important part in it. He stared across the murky room—late enough in all conscience, but he had never refused to see a patient yet. He heard the outer door open and shut, and there was a quiet shuffling of feet in the little vestibule. Several minutes seemed to pass before anyone entered. It was probably much less, but the doctor's nerves were all on edge to-night. He called out irritably :—

" Yes, yes, come in ! Who is it ? "

And then through the gloom he beheld the strangest figure he had ever seen. There stood facing him and unmoving a very tall man with a bandage round his head. Very dark eyes in the deep hollow of their setting seemed to glitter unnaturally beneath it. A black bristling beard with grey tips nearly concealed the surface of his deathly cheeks. He was wearing no hat, but a voluminous black coat buttoned over the lower part of his chin. His hands were in the outside pockets of this coat and seemed to be moving restlessly. The doctor's first reflection was that he looked like a man who had just risen from the dead. He was not given to fears and panics, but for the first time during the course of his practice in this unsavoury neighbourhood he felt a sense of impending danger. As the man moved slowly towards him something prompted him to say sharply :—

" Take your hands out of your overcoat pockets ! "

Yes, there was no doubt about it, his nerves were all wrong to-night. Stories he had heard of men firing through their pockets had flashed to his mind, but when he saw the poor creature obey, and his startled hunted expression, he felt sorry. Speaking more gently, he said :—

" Well, what can I do for you ? You look—you look as though you had been in the wars."

The man gave a little jerky bow, and dived his hand into an inner pocket. " Excuse—doctor," he muttered, producing a card. He pointed to his head and added : " Nothing much. I fall, having fits. I am very ill. But no, it is not that. Ex-cuse —doctor."

He handed over a dirty card on which was printed " Colonel Gaborovski," and some local address. The doctor read it. " Russian," he murmured. There seemed little call to question the man. He carried with him, patently enough, the tragic atmosphere of that poor broken country. The great point was that he was ill and in need of help. John Clay pointed to the chair facing his own.

" Please sit down," he said.

The Russian sat down, but appeared strangely restless. He kept glancing apprehensively around the room, and waving his arm he said :—

" No. Ex-cuse, doctor. I do not come for myself, although indeed, yes, I am ill. It is more urgent. I come to you because I know of you *as a gentleman*. They all say this. Time is pressing. Please to let me to explain."

He stopped, looked down nervously, and appeared to be biting the ends of his moustache, which he had a habit of sucking into his mouth. At last he said :—

" Please, look, doctor. Perhaps I explain better if——"

He again dived his hand into his coat-pocket and produced a packet, which he put down on the doctor's desk in front of him. The doctor stared at the packet in amazement, picked it up, and examined it. It was a packet, tied up with thin string, of several hundred ten-pound Bank of England notes !

He looked up and found the Russian's haunted eyes turned on him imploringly.

" Please, doctor, listen—these are forgeries ! "

He dropped his voice, and the doctor extracted one of the notes and examined it carefully. Well, he could not have told. But, anyway, what about it ? What was it to do with him ? He pushed the note back as though it were something unclean.

Colonel Gaborovski was feverishly biting the tips of his moustache.

" Ours is quite a familiar story, doctor. I had riches and great estates in the Ukraine. The Bolsheviks took everything from me. I will not bore you. My wife died from typhus—indeed, you may say, from starvation. My two sons were beaten to death before my eyes. I too was beaten, but, alas ! I lived. I escaped with my young daughter to Switzerland, where fortunately I had about a thousand pounds invested. I realized the money and we went to live in Paris. But, alas ! two people cannot live for ever in Paris on a thousand pounds. Although, indeed, I was more fortunate than many of my countrymen."

It was obvious that the Colonel was in great physical distress. It was only his nervous energy which enabled him to continue the narrative.

" Your heart is all wrong, my friend," the doctor was thinking, and his mind became actively engaged in thinking of a probable treatment while the other continued :—

" Olga was just sixteen, beautiful, intelli-

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gent, but her health shattered by the horrors and sufferings she had had to endure. I tried to get work, but what could I do? There was no place for old men like me, a foreigner, an invalid. For I, too, was broken in health. I knew that my heart was bad, and I had these fits. I could not lift weights, or hurry, or stand physical strain. Olga, dear child, was more than anxious to help me. But what could she do? Sixteen years, no training or experience, speaking French imperfectly, and delicate in health. We struggled on for three years like this, and then one day in the house of a compatriot I met Brandt and Eissner."

The Colonel paused. He seemed to have had during the last few moments difficulty in controlling his husky voice. While he was silent, Dr. Clay put out his hand and felt the other's pulse. The Russian looked at him almost affectionately, as though aware that some kindness was being done to him, the nature of which he only vaguely comprehended. Tears came into his eyes as he spoke more eagerly.

"I did not know, doctor; I did not know the true nature of these men for many months. And when I did our position, the position of Olga and I, was becoming desperate. I had one hundred and thirty pounds left in the world, and what then? There was much talk of politics, you may be sure, and of what we Russians often talk, life, death, the soul. Though, to be sure, Eissner was a Pole, and Brandt—God alone knows what Brandt was. And one night they explained to me their project. Both had had experience. Indeed, Brandt had served a term of imprisonment in Bavaria for being detected in a similar project. Ah! but he had more experience now. He would not fail again. He had managed to acquire a portion of an uncompleted plant that an old forger had left behind. That gentleman could not take it with him to the place where he had gone. Three hundred pounds would be required to put the plant in perfect working order. So simple! We three should put up one hundred pounds apiece. I shuddered at these suggestions. But the insidious Brandt showed me samples of his prowess. On the other hand, within a few months I could see absolute starvation staring us in the face, and my Olga was developing what I think you call a nervous breakdown and was greatly in need of the comforts and luxuries to which she was accustomed. Oh, doctor, think of my position and forgive me! I was to give up practically the last of my savings, and in exchange was to have ten thousand pounds in forged notes! There was, of course, the risk and difficulty of passing them, but Brandt assured me that this was negligible, if we passed them one at a time. It was, as you would say, the last throw of a gambler. Then I thought it would be too dangerous in France, me—a Russian—passing English ten-pound notes. And so, six weeks ago, Olga and I, we arrived in London, in Bermondsey, where I take two poor rooms. And here you see my first award—two hundred and fifty ten-pound notes—a small fortune of two thousand five hundred pounds."

The doctor regarded his strange visitor searchingly.

"Yes," he said, "and what do you propose to do with them?"

The Russian officer looked him straight in the eye, as though he were concentrating all the forces of his dwindling nervous energy.

"Burn them!" he answered.

IV.

THE doctor started; and he glanced around the room apprehensively. The fog seemed to hang in thin streaks as though the distant walls were swathed in shifting gauze. He spoke a little more sharply:—

"Burn them! Yes, I see. But why—why do you come to me?"

The other continued to speak more quickly and anxiously, but in a lower key.

"Because, doctor, I want to burn them in the presence of a witness, a gentleman, one who is stranger to me, and whose word would not be questioned."

"Why?"

"Brandt gave me two packets in Paris. Any day or night he and Eissner may come with the other two packets, any day, any moment. Even now I dread leaving my daughter one hour. I could not get up the courage to try to change the notes, and then she found out. She found out all. In our poor rooms there is not much chance of concealment. I hid the two packets at the back on the top of the wardrobe. One is there still. Olga found it, and then—ah, God! she saw it all. She went down on her knees and implored me. She called on her saints and the honour of her mother. She wept for hours before the Holy Ikon. And in the end she made me promise—promise—the promise I am trying to keep."

He gave a weary, lingering glance at the packet of notes on the doctor's desk. The doctor had momentarily forgotten the illness of his visitor. His eyes were aglow with interest.

"But tell me, Colonel Gaborovski, why this anxiety to burn the notes in the presence of a witness?"

"Any minute, I say, Brandt and Eissner

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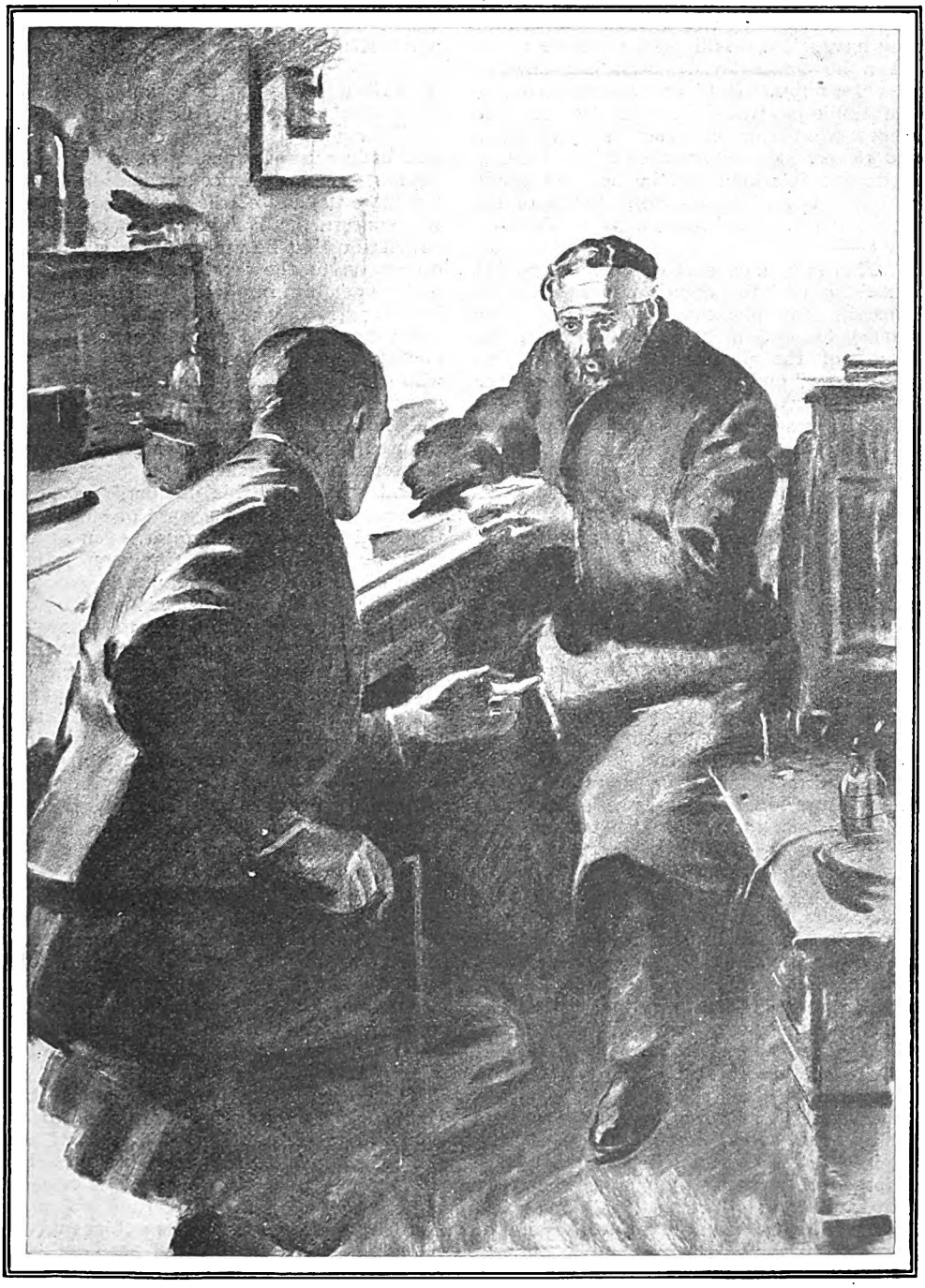

The doctor regarded his strange visitor searchingly.

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may be here. I fear them, and Olga is terrified of Brandt. He has made love to her. I tremble at the designs such a man may have. He would descend to anything. When he comes he will first ask how we pass the notes. If I say we burn them, do you think he would believe it? He will suspect treachery. He is strong, and violent, and clever. He might blackmail. If there is trouble it would not be he who would bear it. I want to wash my hands of the whole thing. Of him—he is a fiend—a devil——"

"This is a nice sort of business to get mixed up in," the doctor was thinking to himself. But his concern for the story seemed for the moment swamped in the claims of the patient. He had out his stethoscope, and without comment on the latter's strange appeal he said, firmly:—

"Please undo your shirt. I want to listen to your heart."

The Colonel undid his shirt, under protest. He seemed to think that precious time was being wasted.

"If you will agree to this, doctor, I will go back and fetch the other packet. I thought it better to ask you first, but time is pressing. Any moment, I say—I am so afraid—my daughter——"

"Please lie on this couch," the doctor said. "And keep quite still. Then we will see." He listened to the older man's heart, and then, with an abrupt "Excuse me," left him lying there and hurried into a small room at the back that had been converted into a laboratory and dispensing room. The doctor's face looked anxious as he stretched out his hands to the various bottles. He at length emerged with a spoon on which was balanced a white mixture. "Now!" he exclaimed, advancing rapidly. He observed that the patient, whose back was turned to him, remained still and made no response. He went up and was about to rest his hand on the other's shoulder, and administer the mixture, when he glanced at his face. It required no second glance from the experienced eye of Dr. Clay to realize the horror that was upon him. *The man was dead!*

He stood there for nearly half a minute holding the spoon in his hand, staring helplessly at the dead Russian, the packet of forged notes under the glow of the green lamp, and the fog draping the distant walls. Almost at random a favourite saying of Aimée's flashed through his mind: "Nothing ever happens in this dreary hole!"

Then he put the spoon down and, for some reason he could not afterwards account for, tiptoed across the room and locked the door of the passage leading to the house. The whole affair had been thrust upon him with such tragic abruptness that he felt he would require minutes to reconsider the whole situation.

HIS duty as a professional man was obvious enough. Call in the police, have the body taken to the mortuary, and hand over the packet of notes. And beyond giving evidence at the inquest, that would be the end of the matter so far as he was concerned. But he couldn't elude the conviction that he was under some kind of obligation to the dead man. The Russian had trusted him implicitly. He had come to him to perform what was nothing more nor less than an act of atonement. The other packet would be found by the police, and who would be likely to believe that the owner had intended to destroy them? The honour of a name that had probably counted for much in its own country would be eternally besmirched.

And then—and this of course made the strongest appeal to his sense of chivalry to the dead man—the daughter, even at that moment anxiously awaiting her father's return! She it was, apparently, who had been the guardian angel of his honour; and if the matter were allowed to follow the normal course, it would be upon her head that the full blow of the tragedy would fall. She, too, would be suspected, and, if not sent to prison, in any case insulted and thrown penniless into the gutter. And beyond that, what appeared to be a more terrifying spectre to this poor household than anything else, the sinister figure of one—Brandt. Brandt, the forger and blackmailer, who was "strong, violent, and clever," and who "had made love to her."

Whatever his professional duty might be, the doctor knew that he was under the spell of some more urgent and humane decree. He looked at the Colonel's card and noted the address: 137, Bannister Row (third floor). He knew Bannister Row well, two interminable rows of dirty, dishevelled houses from which most of his more irreconcilable and violent patients came.

There seemed no alternative but to take this packet of notes back himself to the daughter, explain what had happened, and then, if she wished it, burn the two packets in her presence. It was not a cheerful programme, to turn out on that foul night and face the hazards of this dubious adventure, but the doctor did not hesitate. The weariness and nervous exhaustion that had assailed him earlier in the evening seemed to vanish. His mind once made up, he knew he had the power to see it through. First of all he made a more careful examination of the dead man, then he covered the body

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reverently with a sheet. He put on his hat and coat and thrust the packet of notes into an inner pocket. Then he looked round as though taking stock of a strategical position. For a moment he hesitated. Should he pop down the passage into the house and tell Aimée? It would be foolish to tell her the full details of the tragedy. She would be alarmed, refuse to be left alone in the house with that body there. But he might tell her he was going out on a case and would probably be late. Then he remembered their recent row, and her decision about the spare bedroom. He frowned, switched off the light, let himself out, and pulled the door to with a decisive snap.

V.

THE streets seemed darker than he would have believed. It was only his great familiarity with the neighbourhood which enabled him to grope his way to his destination. Forbidding figures glided by him. Once he seemed to be surrounded by them, then he heard a voice, almost like an appeal: "The doctor!" and the figures vanished. He found Bannister Row, and as he reached No. 137, two figures were just emerging. He had a momentary qualm. Brandt and Eissner? He was immediately reassured, however, by a third party, a woman who was saying good-bye to them. The voices were local enough. He pushed by her and walked boldly upstairs. There was a dim gas-jet alight on the first landing. The rest of the staircase was in utter darkness. On the third floor he rapped in a sharp business-like way on the larger of two doors. There was no answer. He knocked several times and then tried the other. There was still no reply. After a few moments' reflection he returned to the first door, knocked again, and then, opening it an inch or two, called out: "May I come in?" Silence again followed this appeal, but he observed that there was a light in the room.

Taking his courage in both hands he entered, leaving the door slightly ajar behind him. The room was meagrely furnished, and was lighted by a gas-jet on the window side of the room. There was no fire, but in the farther corner was a bed in a mild state of disruption, as though someone had just left it. He called into the room: "Is Miss Gaborovski here? This is the doctor." Still no answer. He peered about, and then went into the other room, which was in darkness. He struck a match. There was no sign of life. This was all very mysterious. He was certain he had not made a mistake. From this opposition to his good intentions he drew a certain stimulus. He felt obstinate. Returning to the lighted room, he paced up and down it. Probably Miss Gaborovski had gone to do a little late shopping, or was calling on a neighbour. She would certainly not be long in view of the fact that she was expecting her father. His mind became suddenly occupied with the question of that second packet of notes. He was conscious that it was extremely important that he should have possession of both packets. Only in this way would the situation be safe. No one would be likely to suspect him. He remembered the Colonel's statement—on the top of the wardrobe. It was a heavy, ugly, Victorian affair. He thought suddenly he would like to assure himself that the packet was there. He took a chair, placed it against the wardrobe, stood on it, and reached. His hand had just grasped the packet when he heard a low but distinct cry of fear. It came from inside the wardrobe. He stepped down and opened the door.

Crouching among the clothes, her face almost buried, was a young girl. On her white, drawn face was an expression of utter terror. She gave a little scream as the door opened and revealed her. The doctor said in the calmest voice he could summon:—

"It's all right! It's all right! I'm only the doctor. I come from your father."

She gave a kind of groan of relief, but still seemed too frightened and upset to step out. The doctor tried to smile.

"It's all right. It's all right, Miss Gaborovski. I have come to help you. Please come out, will you?"

At last she seemed reassured. She stepped out and sat on the end of the bed, holding her head in her hands.

"I understand," she said. "It is kind of you. But I have been through so much. When I heard the knock on the door I thought it might be—someone I dreaded. But my father? Where is he? Why do you come alone?"

The doctor saw that this was not the kind of woman to treat like a child. She had already been through too much. And so he told her the exact truth about her father, his visit, the packet of notes, and his death. And then he stood there with bowed head while the girl wept noiselessly. He could tell that her father's death, shock as it was, did not come as a great surprise. She must have known the true state of his condition. At last she looked up at him, and he looked questioningly at her. The position between them had yet to be adjusted. The two packets were bulging conspicuously from his breast-pocket. They, of course, must be burnt, but in the meantime there was a matter of greater urgency which had

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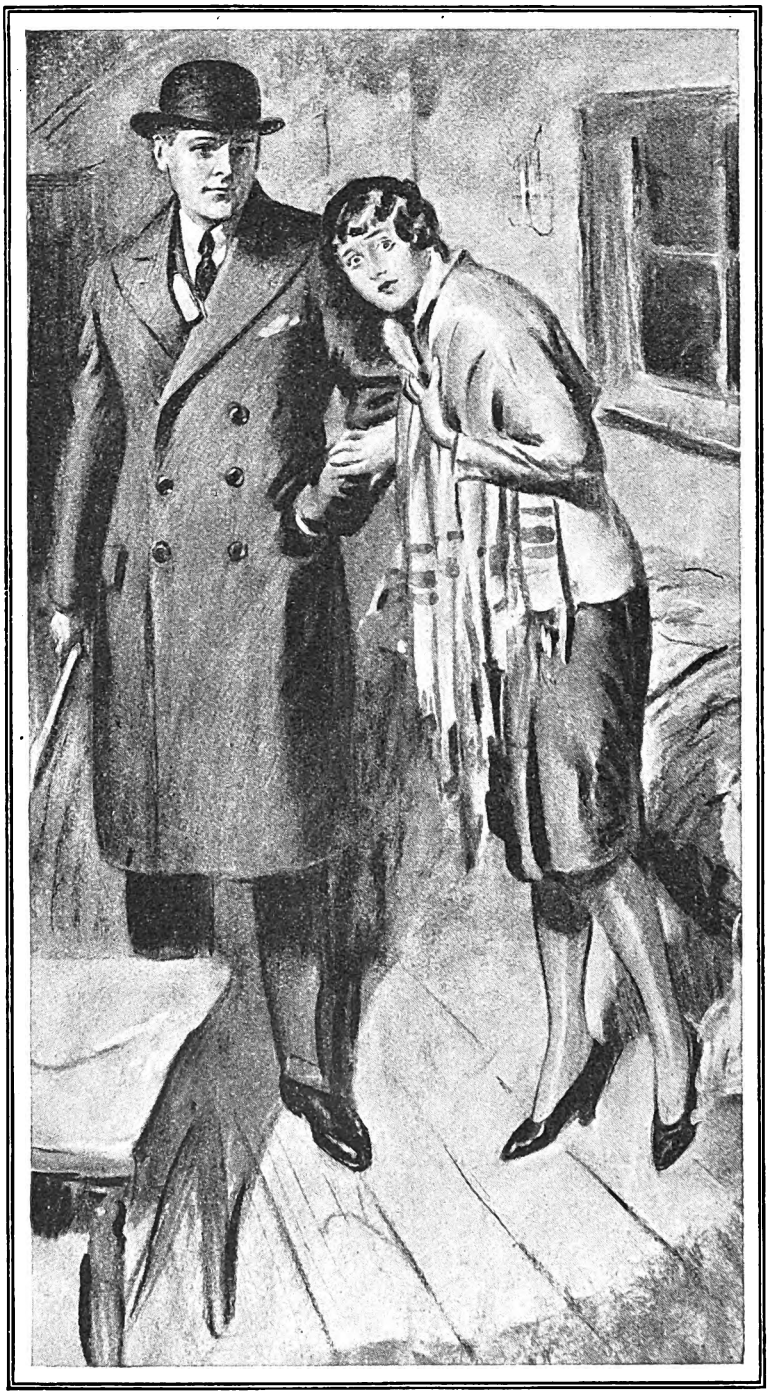

She rushed towards him and gripped his forearm.

been troubling him during the last few minutes. This girl could not spend the night here alone. It was obvious that she was completely unstrung, and in dread of a visit from the man Brandt.

The doctor took a turn up and down the room, then speaking softly he said:—

"Listen, Miss Gaborovski. I think it would be well if you come and spend the night at my house. My wife and housekeeper will look after you. It is getting late, and you, I know, are very exhausted after your—your cruel experience." He tapped his pockets lightly. "To-morrow we will make any arrangement you like about these, and about your father."

The girl fixed her deep eyes upon him, and nodded slowly. He could not help being secretly flattered that, although she looked a little surprised, there was not about her expression a trace of anything else but complete confidence. She began to collect clothes, and things she would be likely to want, almost hurriedly, as though, the decision having been made, there was no need to hesitate. The doctor looked at his watch, and then continued to pace the room slowly. It was just after eleven. He

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smiled to himself a little sardonically when he thought of Aimée and her first night of instalment in the spare bedroom. Well, she needn't turn out. There was another unoccupied servant's bedroom on the floor above, next to Mrs. Griggs, the housekeeper. It was more than improbable that she would be in bed. She liked to sit up late with her novels and her gramophone. If she was, he would have to disturb her and explain the situation. Selfish as she was, Aimée was not exactly a fool. She would grumble, but as the arrangement was only for a night (or perhaps two) she would probably make the best of it. Poor Aimée! He wished at that moment they had not quarrelled earlier in the evening. While his mind was thus occupied he suddenly heard the girl give a cry. She rushed towards him and gripped his forearm.

"Oh, doctor," she whispered huskily, "listen, listen!"

He heard heavy footsteps mounting the stairs. He gripped his stick firmly. Whatever was in store, he felt imbued with a kind of fatalistic confidence. The affairs of the evening had happened with such surprising rapidity, he had not had time to put them in their true perspective, but he was subtly aware of being in the right himself, and that consequently all difficulties and dangers could be ruled out. He knew instinctively the fear that had gripped his companion at the sound of these ominous footsteps. He felt her touch tighten on his arm. She was probably unaware that she was holding on to him at all. As the footsteps came nearer, he kept repeating: "It's all right. It's quite all right."

They were within a few steps from the top when one foot seemed to kick the riser clumsily. There followed a mild stumble, and then a loud raucous voice burst into a drunken song, and the unseen figure went blundering past the door and up to the floor above. In that grim moment the doctor's ironic sense could not but be tickled by a vision of this frail young girl's face lighting up with joyful relief at what was probably a quite usual occurrence in her pathetic life.

"Come now," he said, and they fumbled their way down into the street.

VI.

THE night was still pitch-dark, and when he said:—

"Will you please take my arm?"

he noticed that she did so almost eagerly. Groping through the fog, he wondered at one moment what certain people might think if they could visualize him walking arm in arm with this entirely unknown woman, and with five thousand pounds' worth of forged bank-notes in his pocket! He, a most reputable local practitioner! It was not likely, however, that they would meet anyone who either knew or could recognize them, and in five minutes' time he was opening his front door. It seemed queer, but it was not till that moment that he felt a twinge of nervousness. It would be a little difficult to explain the whole matter to Aimée in a few sentences. He hoped she had gone to bed. It would be simpler to explain without the presence of the girl. The drawing-room light was out, so apparently she had. He turned it on and, pointing to the easy chair by the fire, said:—

"Please sit down, Miss Gaborovski, and make yourself comfortable. I will fetch my wife."

He went upstairs, and first into the room that had been their united bedroom. There was no one there. He then went across the passage. The spare bedroom was also deserted. "H'm, that's queer!" he thought. He returned to the larger bedroom and began to look round carefully. He noticed that the large double bed was made up for one, and then his eye caught sight of a note in the middle of the single pillow. He picked it up. It was addressed to himself; and in Aimée's large scrawly writing he read:—

"After what happened this evening you may not be surprised to hear that I am utterly fed-up with it all, and am on my way to the South of France with some of my friends.—AIMÉE."

So! He could hardly account afterwards for the reason why this curt note made him savagely angry. He tore it up into minute scraps and threw it into the paper basket. After his experiences of the evening it seemed peculiarly selfish and cruel. And what a situation it placed him in! The girl might think he—no, she would not be likely to think that. There was in any case the faithful Mrs. Griggs. Mrs. Griggs had been with him for many years before he married, and he had reason to believe she had no great affection for Aimée. He sprang upstairs three at a time and knocked at her door. To his relief she opened it almost instantly. (As a matter of fact Mrs. Griggs had been indulging in a quarterly luxury of washing her head, and was not ready for bed yet.) He explained the whole situation to her as briefly as possible, adding casually that his wife had suddenly been called away to visit a sick relation. Mrs. Griggs brought her practical mind to bear on the position instantly, and even foresaw the advisability of "the poor lamb" occupying the room next her own rather than the official spare bedroom. The

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only thing was she would have to change the mattresses. Before this operation, however, the doctor persuaded her to come down and meet their guest. He felt the conventional call of producing a woman of some kind in the unusual circumstances. Later on he was less convinced of this urgency when he observed how preoccupied the girl was with her own distresses. Mrs. Griggs bustled round and produced some chicken sandwiches and some tea, and once the girl's face momentarily lighted up, and this was at the sudden inspiration of the doctor in handing her her tea in a glass, with a slice of lemon instead of milk. It was past midnight, but he had another duty to perform before he retired for the night. He must report the matter to the police. When their light repast was finished he could see that the girl was still agitated. In a low voice she said: "Now, doctor, if you please—my father. The packets of notes." He had quite forgotten the notes, and of course she wished to see her father's body. He nodded understandingly, fetched the packets, and said:—

"Please come with me, then, mademoiselle."

They entered the bleak consulting-room, and he withdrew the sheet from the body and turned away, pretending to busy himself at his desk. He heard her muttering a prayer, and after a time there was a deep sigh, and he knew that she was coming towards him. When he looked up the girl said, almost inaudibly: "My father is now ready." Then he noticed that she had pulled the sofa round a little so that the head of the dead man faced the fireplace. At this she pointed, and the doctor, realizing what was expected of him, carried the packets across the room, and kneeling side by side they burnt them until there was nothing but a white heap of ash upon the hearth. And then, with a little cry, she arose and kicked the ash under the hearth. "A strange race," he thought, and having briefly explained to her what had to be done, he left her kneeling by her father's body while he went in search of the police.

VII.

IN the days immediately following the inquest the doctor was concerned with the problem of how to retain his guest. There was no question that she would have left at once, but for two reasons—lack of money and sheer terror of the streets, particularly Bannister Row. She would most certainly never go back there. But even the surrounding neighbourhood seemed haunted by the menace of Brandt and Eissner. She was afraid to go out. She put forward tentative and childish feelers to the doctor with regard to employment in some other part of the country, but he put her off with an assuring smile. She was quite unfit for such an adventure; the little bedroom might just as well be occupied as not, the cost of her keep was negligible. Let her remain until—well, until something turned up or her health became more robust.

He found little jobs for her to do, sticking labels on bottles, making bandages, answering the telephone. And because the girl simply must have air, he would sometimes take her on his rounds in the little two-seater. And when he came out of a house he would find her all huddled up, a shawl concealing her features.

January was a wet and dreary month. Sometimes it flashed through his mind—doubtless on the Riviera the sun would be shining, and the fortunate people would be idling beneath the palm trees, or listening to impassioned music. But no word came from Aimée. Nevertheless, others wrote to him. The Riviera is a strange place to choose for any behaviour one might wish to keep secret. He turned to his work with the greater avidity. In her quiet way the girl began to be useful to him, and he liked to feel her about the house. She glided about like a little mouse, and her face always lighted up with pleasure at sight of him. Once when he was called up in the middle of the night, and with many oaths and growls had dressed himself and gone out into the cold passage, he heard someone on the floor above whisper: "Doctor!" He looked up, and Olga in her dark dressing-gown came gliding down the stairs, and in her hand she held a cup of hot tea. After that it became a habit. And sometimes she would sit up for him, hand him his slippers, and ask questions about the case in hand. As she explained to him, she had learnt to love the poor. He knew that she was longing to visit his patients, to give them what cheer and succour a young girl could. It was only her constant fear which prevented her.

And then at the end of the month he was able to give her good news. It came through what was described as "A Warning to the Public" in a paragraph in the newspaper. It appeared that in a squalid neighbourhood in Paris the attention of the police was called early one morning to screams coming from a basement. On entering the premises the police discovered two men, one of whom was bleeding from scalp wounds, and who died a few hours later in hospital; the other man was recognized as a well-known forger, lately going by the name of Brandt. He was arrested. They also discovered a complete forger's outfit, including an apparently new plant for manufacturing English ten-pound notes. The public were warned that

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these notes, which were a remarkably skilful copy of the original, were probably already being " tried out " on the market. Brandt, who had been charged with the murder of his accomplice, tried to commit suicide later in his cell.

The doctor never saw a more sudden change in anyone than that which came over his guest at the receipt of this news. The colour came into her cheeks, her eyes glowed, and she became animated.

And with this change she began to go out alone once more. He found himself dreading one day that with her new freedom she would want to enlarge it even more. In other words, he dreaded that she might want to go away. To his relief he found that in any case for the moment her interests were more nearly concerned with his practice. She asked to be allowed to run errands for him, to take medicines round to his patients, and to talk to them and cheer them. She looked after his appointment book, and helped to check the stock of his laboratory.

And so the long winter eventually wore itself out, and April came and daffodils and narcissi bedecked the meagre yards and window-boxes of the brave spirits of Bermondsey. And Olga, too, became gay, and the doctor found himself for ever thinking of her, and succumbing almost without moral protest to the temptation. He felt strangely happy. One morning came a letter from a firm of lawyers. When he read it he almost blushed with the insolence of it. They were, the letter explained, writing on behalf of his wife. She was, it appeared, prepared to forgive him. But there were stipulations. Apparently this life on the Riviera or the society of her friends had not proved all that she had hoped. In any case, she was prepared to return and resume their normal relationship on the understanding that he procured a practice in a more respectable neighbourhood !

Messrs. Hawkins and Hillward added that as their client was anxious to have the matter settled quickly, would he kindly wire his decision direct to her to an address they gave at Bordighera ?

He was about to start out on his rounds when this letter arrived. He smiled sardonically, his mind instinctively reverting to a small locked drawer in the bureau where were letters, not Aimée's letters, but letters from various friends written from the Riviera, where everybody knows everything that is going on, and the misdemeanours of others are food and wine. Doubtless there would be further correspondence between Messrs. Hawkins and Hillward and his lawyers. He put the letter in his pocket and went out into the hall. He found Olga brushing his coat ! She looked up at him and smiled.

" Here, what are you doing ? " he exclaimed.

" Trying to justify my existence," she answered, laughing.

" Are you coming with me ? " he whispered, as she helped him on with his coat. " I'm walking this morning. It's so fine and sunny. Do come."

With a little more persuasion she agreed. They walked briskly through the mean streets in the pale sunshine. The doctor enjoyed a sudden spasm of surprise that he had not noticed before that Bermondsey was the most beautiful place in the wide world. He hummed under his breath. Now and then her brown eyes peeped at him shyly. It seemed unnecessary to talk. They were both so happy. Passing a post-office he exclaimed : " Halt ! I have to send a telegram." She went in with him, and heard him ask for a foreign form. When it came he took out an envelope and copied out an address. Then he appeared to hesitate. Idly she wondered who the telegram was to, and what he was going to say in it. But it was not her business. Suddenly he looked across at her with a deep yearning expression she could not fail to understand. Her own eyes gave back their response, and then she looked away trembling. And so she did not see what the doctor had written. Neither would it have conveyed much to her if she had. For the telegram merely said : " Sorry; shall be making other arrangements."

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Flappers—British and American

By

GILBERT FRANKAU

Illustrated by
LINDSAY CABLE

IMPRIMIS, what is a flapper? It is fair, I think, to say that she must be a girl of the English-speaking races. A Spanish flapper, for instance, would be unthinkable. And a Chinese one? But imagination boggles at the mere pig-tailed idea.

We, you see—British and Americans—are races apart. We believe in "Ideals," and "Sentiment." Not that there is anything particularly idealistic, or particularly sentimental, about the flapper of to-day.

But to return to our problem. A flapper, in the years of my youth, was a girl who had not yet "put her hair up," or elongated her skirts, or discarded tam-o'-shanters. To-day, I maintain, with all heads bobbed, and the skirt a mere apron, and the Hat (the huge, be-strawed, be-feathered, be-buckled, and be-ribboned Hat of my juvenescence) relegated to limbo, the only correct description of a flapper is "a young woman who has not yet been in love." Because first love—however much poets may sing and romancers make novels about it—is uncommonly like Distemper, though Love, of course, unlike Distemper, always recurs.

A flapper is "a young woman who has not yet been in love."

Starting, then, from this firm basis, we may go on to presume that a flapper's *age* is immaterial. What counts, being the condition of her "heart." And having thus broadened the scope of what

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must (owing to the human limitations imposed even on travelling novelists) be largely an academic, and philosophical, inquiry, I come to my main theme.

Wherein lies the difference—for there is a very wide and a very startling difference—between the British and the American flapper? Primarily I believe—and pray do not be startled or shocked at this belief of mine—in our national outlooks on divorce.

With us, you see, divorce—or any dissolution of the marriage-tie—is still rather a shameful business. We are a conservative race; and hate "scrapping" a wedding-ring just as much as we hate scrapping a piece of machinery. But in America divorce is a recognized social process. Marriage, therefore, loses at least half its terrors; and the "flapper-mind," to coin a term, of the American nation inclines to matrimony rather than to flirtation. The which, considering the attractions of the American flapper, is a great boon to, and a great safeguard for, the married traveller from a strange land.

And the second factor which any conscientious student of this really great subject must consider is Numbers: that awful two million surplus of its female over its male citizens which may yet wreck the whole convention-fabric of this Island Realm.

In America that surplus is not yet apparent. The sexes, taking them by and large, are evenly balanced. Accordingly, the flapper-mind of our Transatlantic—shall we say?—disputants is at least a thousand-per-cent. more self-confident than our own. She is mathematically sure of a mate, is the American flapper. Whereas ours are haunted, and not always subconsciously either, by the fear of being left among those two millions who "also ran."

ANOTHER factor, too, differentiates the two national flapper outlooks: and that is the universal Transatlantic dominance, which one observes all the way from New York to Los Angeles, of woman over man. Generalities, of course, are always misleading; and some men in America (five per cent. of her male population maybe) still manage to preserve a semblance of authority over their womenkind. On the whole, however, it is a hag-ridden continent—though the youthful hags thereof are more radiant than the untravelled European can conceive.

The beauty of America's young womanhood, indeed, is so overwhelming that it takes even a trained observer like myself quite a while before he realizes how much this beauty owes to nature, and how much to art. You would imagine that, in a country such as the United States, where every girl is more or less certain of matrimony and the female rules the roost, the average girl might be inclined to take liberties with her appearance, to grow a little casual about it, to suffer from self-neglect. Just as you would imagine that, in a country such as Great Britain, where every wife-hunter has at least two girls from whom to choose, and where man, despite all the massed barrages of the sex-war, is still predominant, the average young woman would never let herself be seen unmanicured, unpowdered, unlipsalved, or unshampooed.

The converse, nevertheless, is the case; and much as I admire the flappers of my own country, much as I believe in our British "raw material," I should not be doing my duty as an unbiased critic were I not to state, and very definitely, that when it comes to grooming, the American filly leaves ours at the post.

You may say, of course, that the American girl has more money to spend than ours have. But though this is a partial truth it is far from being the whole. America, you see, does not really worship the dollar. She worships, mainly, the job. And because woman's main job is, and always has been, to make herself attractive, the American girl, if she be rich, goes *ipso facto* to the "beauty parlour," while her poorer sister learns the tricks of the beauty parlour for herself. A dirty finger-nail in a New York office is almost as rare as a dirty wash-basin. Can the same be said of London? You know it can't be. Hygienically, for care of one's personal appearance is hygiene, just as common sense is intellect, many of our young women are still in the eighteen-eighties, and the offices they brighten in eighteen-forty-three.

Yet intellectually, I am convinced, the British girl is as far ahead of her Transatlantic—shall we say?—competitor as Europe is ahead of America in the one art worth cultivating, the art of life. It is a hectic land, that vast continent which stretches from Atlantic to Pacific; a land of greater luxury than comfort—and the women of it take on the characteristics of it. They, too, are hectic; built more for speed than for comfort; intoxicated, as all America is intoxicated, with sheer bounding success.

"I might be a failure," thinks the English flapper; but the American knows, "I can't."

Were I the Great Flapperographer, from which Heaven defend a poor quadragenarian; were I even one of those novelists who pretend to know a great deal about women, I might elaborate this point; showing how, in every walk of life, the flapper from beyond the Atlantic triumphs

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over all obstacles, simply because she does not know they are there. But being, as I never tire of pointing out, merely a humble inquirer into great mysteries, I content myself with hoping that this particular brand of self-confidence will not end, as most things American end, by transplanting itself over here. Self-confidence, I find, though the most admirable quality, can become a little wearisome; as witness the flapper of Cincinnati who rushed at me, both hands outstretched, declaring that she was "proud to meet the greatest writer of detective novels in the world."

Poor girl! She thought she was meeting my esteemed confrère, Phillips Oppenheim. And I hadn't the heart to undeceive her, for which may my esteemed confrère and whatever gods there be forgive me. Since there is much joy in ignorance. As witness another flapper of my acquaintance, British this time, who said to me when the greatest organizing genius in the States, Mr. Hoover, took it into his head to castigate us for our rubber monopoly: "The beast! And mother only bought one of his carpet-sweepers the other day."

The Mr. Hoover in question, needless to say, does not make carpet-sweepers, any more than I habitually write detective novels. But the mention of that humble machine towards domestic welfare brings me to another marked differentiation between American flappers and our own. Everything about America smacks a little of machinery; and inevitably the female of the species comes under the rule. She *is* a little machine-made, both about her appearance and about her opinions; and yet, though always anxious to tell you, in her own vernacular, how "hard-boiled" she is, she is as sentimental as "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," or the hero of "If Winter Comes."

She is sensitive, too; a thousand times more sensitive than the average English girl. But then all America is so sensitive, as all adolescent nations are sensitive, that even I—and the Lord knows I am not famed for tactfulness — never dared to counter any of the "knocks" I received about my nationality ("What! An Englishman up before ten. Say, you must be some hustler") with that priceless story about the Scotsman who swam immune through the shark-infested waters of the Caribbean ("Aweel! Even a shark won't swallow that, laddie") by the simple expedient of tattooing himself all over with the legend, "America won the War."

You do see men of forty squiring "kids" to American dance-halls; but American journalists call the quadragenarians "sugar-daddies," and the kids "sugar-babies."

But to return to our flappers; and more particularly to their outlook on that most necessary of all commodities to their enjoyment, the adult male. It is a strange fact, for which a humble quadragenarian inquirer dares find no explanation, that the average

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The boy dreams about her—

British flapper of to-day will tell you, and no bones about it, "I don't like *young* men. They bore me to tears." Thirty to forty, she suggests, is the interesting, and likeable, period of manhood. Whereas her American—shall we say?—sister-huntress prefers a quarry of about her own age.

You do see men of forty, and of fifty, squiring "kids" to American dance-halls; but American journalists call the quadragenarians "sugar-daddies," and the kids "sugar-babies"—the word "sugar-baby" meaning, in so far as it can be translated, "demi-vamp."

But the demi-vamps, and the sugar-daddies, and the "butter-and-egg men," and the "gentlemen-prefer-blondes," and the cocktail-swilling she-girls of New York or Chicago are not, really, America; any more than the Bright Young People of London or the "photographed with a friend" crowd of Melton Mowbray are the British Isles.

In all countries, such types as these take the limelight; while behind the limelight, overshadowed by it, the average everyday life of average everyday man and woman goes on. And you must visit Salt Lake City, Utah (the heart of the American continent), or Cedar Rapids, Iowa (the epitome of it)—just as you must visit Halifax, or Dewsbury, or Surbiton—if you would realize the average lives of the United States, or the United Kingdom, to-day.

They are marvellous lives, really—these average lives of the English-Speaking Peoples—so good and so wide and so free, when one compares them with the lives of our ancestors, that one wonders, every now and again, whether freedom is not degenerating into licence; whether the "good times" now being enjoyed, more particularly in America, may not eventually bring the English-Speaking Peoples down.

Maybe we—and especially our flappers—are asking too much of life. The cocktail-swilling she-girls of New York, and the Bright Young People of London, certainly are. Yet even if this be so, even if the English-Speaking Peoples do eventually go down before the less pleasure-loving races, the flapper will endure.

For the flapper—however hard-boiled and however unsentimental she may imagine herself—is potential womanhood, Venus Anadyomene, the goddess who arises from

—the young man kisses her—

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the sea. The boy dreams about her; the young man (if he be a young man and not a young epicene) kisses her; quadragenarians, even the most sophisticated and the most widely travelled ones, can be hurt by her; only the octogenarian, in fact, and he not always, can look on her unmoved.

Time was—and not so long ago, either—when men wrote about the "woman of thirty" as a "siren." But that time is passing, if not already by. The whole spirit of to-day is a youth-spirit. As we grow wiser in mind, so we grow younger in feeling. We want to dance through the night; not lounge through it in carpet-slippers with a fusty smoking-cap on our muddled head.

And because this is so, because the youth-spirit is the only spirit worth possessing, it is to be hoped, both in the interests of travellers to that great country, the U.S.A., and of its inhabitants, that the American flapper will not allow herself to become too sophisticated, that she will continue—underneath that "Fordized" outward beauty of hers—to be sensitive, and sentimental, and romantic, and that she will never adopt the sugar-daddy in preference to "the boy."

—quadragenarians can be hurt by her—

—only the octogenarian, and he not always, can look on her unmoved.

Youth does call to youth in America; even though one of the greatest successes on the New York stage had for final curtain the wife saying to the husband, "Well, George, you may have your flapper as long as I have my tango-lizard." So that if ever I recover from my last visit there (in ten years maybe), and dare once again that long, long trail which leads to San Francisco, I am almost sure that, at four-and-fifty, I shall be immune from, and uninteresting to, either the demi-vamp or the she-girl.

And perchance, after another decade, the same immunity will be mine in England. A consummation to be wished for most devoutly. Because at the moment—and why should any man who is a man not confess this thing?—I adore not one flapper but all the flappers. "Although, sir," as the gentleman in the "Tuxedo" (Anglicè—dinner jacket) said to me after our eighth "highball" (Anglicè—whisky-and-soda) in Kansas City, "I sure am a monochronogamist."

Meaning, presumably, "One flapper at a time."

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The Amazing Abduction

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Illustrated by
S. ABBEY

THE taxicab drew up at the narrow opening to the mews in which Lady Muriel's quaint abode was situated. Brett was stricken with a sudden uneasiness, and insisted upon walking with her to the little flight of outside steps which led to her front door.

"I wish you didn't live in such an outlandish spot," he observed, doubtfully. "Anything might happen to you here."

She laughed up into his face, apparently unconscious of the fact that he was still holding her fingers.

"Well, nothing ever does happen," she confided. "Sometimes I am not sure that I don't wish it would."

Something very nearly happened at that moment, but a chauffeur opened his door at the bottom of the yard and Philip Brett lost his nerve.

"Until to-morrow," he sighed, as he reluctantly released her fingers and turned away.

Lady Muriel was possessed of such a natural fund of courage and had lived her bachelor existence for so long that she was incapable of nerves, as the term is generally understood. Nevertheless, as she heard Brett's taxicab drive away, and was fitting her key into the lock of her bright green front door, she was conscious of a feeling which she never remembered to have experienced before. The door responded readily to the turning of the key, swung open and back again. The light leaped into being in her tiny hall, and there was no sign there of the slightest disturbance. She picked up some letters from the table, turned the handle of her sitting-room door, and entered. Almost simultaneously the lights flashed on, and she felt a hand over her mouth, whilst another grasped her outstretched wrist. The fingers over her mouth, as she remembered for long afterwards, were cool and strong, and seemed as though they had been washed in water containing some aromatic perfume. She could do nothing but stare into the face bent down towards her.

"Pardon me," the intruder said, gently. "An ungracious manner of introduction, I fear, but it occurred to me that you might be a little alarmed at finding a stranger here, and inclined to call out. It would have been a pity to have brought Mr. Brett back."

"Who are you? What do you want?" she gasped.

"I have a hundred names," he answered, making a slight, easy movement which placed him between her and the door. "A hundred names, and a hundred personalities. What shall I call myself to you, Lady Muriel? Why not Matthew?"

The situation was terrifying enough, but for some inexplicable reason she was less afraid now than astonished. He was taller than she had expected. His complexion was pale; his eyes, of a curious grey-green colour, had haunted her more than once during the last few evenings. His mouth only was too hard to be pleasant, with that Mephistophelian upward curve which still had its attraction. His iron-grey hair was brushed back from a prominent forehead. His attire subscribed scrupulously to the mode of the moment.

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"You—Matthew?" she exclaimed. "Why, you've been at the Florida the last three nights."

"Quite true," he admitted, with a little bow. "The last two, if you will permit me to say so, chiefly for the pleasure of watching you. I do wish you would persuade Brett to have some dancing lessons, though."

"I don't consider that he needs them," she answered, coldly. "I enjoy dancing with him very much. How did you get in here?"

He laughed, as though the question amused him.

"I get in where I choose," he told her. "There is no lock in the world which could defy me if the attraction on the other side of the door were sufficient."

She looked at him uneasily. There were times when the hardness seemed to pass from his eyes and reveal strange depths.

"Well," she said, "I think you had better go. I imagine you are not here to rob me. My poor belongings are at your disposal if you want them, but, although I live in a somewhat Bohemian way, I am not used to visitors at this time of night."

"Your belongings are entirely sacred," he assured her. "At the same time, as, under the peculiar circumstances, my opportunities for improving my acquaintance with you might be reckoned scanty, permit me to stay—shall we say ten minutes? You will sit down, won't you? I am going, if I may, to take a supreme liberty. I shall venture to mix myself a whisky-and-soda."

She sat down; there seemed to be very little else to do. At the sideboard, where he lingered for a moment, he was between her and the door.

"You are quite welcome to a drink," she conceded, "but I suppose you know that if by chance anyone should come near to whom I could appeal—if I could attract the attention of anyone down below, for instance—I should give you into custody."

"That," he remonstrated, "would be scarcely playing the game. This is a visit of courtesy, Lady Muriel. I have extended no Raffles-like hand towards your treasures. I have come because I wished once more to compare your living profile with the profile of my divine picture, and to express again my profound admiration for you."

"You have admired many women, haven't you?" she rejoined, angry with herself that her voice was not quite steady.

He sighed.

"Alas, yes," he confessed. "Yet lately no one has taken that place in my affections into which you have stepped so easily. There was the Roman lady, of whom you may have heard," he reflected, after a moment's pause. "I did everything man could do for that woman. I even murdered her husband, with whom she was bored to death, and I stole from her aunt, the Princess, the Corriati pearls. And then—she betrayed me. It was the one time of my life in which I have been really in danger. I remember it now. They tracked me down to the bar of the Grand Hotel in Rome—seven of them. I was there alone, but I escaped."

"You always escape!" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Yes, I always escape," he admitted. "I possess a mediæval charm, Lady Muriel. Once I used to fear arrest; now I have no fears. I take what seem to be great risks to others, but they are not risks to me. You will forgive me if I replenish my glass. Perhaps you will allow me to offer you something. Champagne is a wine which I seldom touch, and whisky at the night clubs I dread. Besides, drink in a public place is a thing to be avoided by a poor creature like myself, against whom everyone's hand is turned."

SHE rose to her feet and stood beside him.

"Soda-water alone, please," she begged. "I am not like you. I have been drinking champagne."

He filled the glass, but, instead of giving it to her at once, he suddenly took her hand and drew her a little towards him in an embrace more suggested than actual, supplicating, almost deferential. He looked down into her eyes, and she felt a curious hateful disturbance of the senses. His voice, which had barked out death to innocent men, was insinuatingly tender.

"You are rather wonderful, Lady Muriel," he murmured. "Why don't you leave your dull world, take that one little step across the chasm, and try mine. No one would ever find us where I should take you."

She tried to extricate herself, but was miserably ashamed of the feebleness of her effort.

"You must be mad!" she cried. "Don't you realize that I know who you are, that I know of the terrible things you have done, and for which some day or other you will have to pay?"

His smile faded away, but his eyes were as tender as ever.

"My dear," he protested, "what have I done so terrible? I have brushed on one side the men who have stood in my way. They know me. If they have courted death, it is not my fault. I am a criminal—granted—but there are many others who hide their crimes, and are married in Hanover Square. I am at least not hypocritical, and I am a

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lure a man, who could really show you the way in life which you have lost, to his death —and then you would be sorry—yes, I grant you that," he concluded, knocking the ash from his cigarette, "you would be sorry."

He took up his silk-lined black evening coat and put it on, leisurely adjusted his scarf, and, hat in hand, moved towards the door without making any further attempt to come near her. "Lady Muriel," he said, "I shall never forget the pleasure of my first call upon you. You are all that I fancied you to be. You resemble, even more than I had dared to hope, my divine picture. If you ring up Scotland Yard now," he added, with his hand upon the door, "I shall only have a bare ten minutes' start. They will not find me, but that will not be your fault. Au revoir, Lady Muriel."

"Good night," she said, weakly. "Please go!"

"Au revoir," he repeated, stooping to pass through the doorway, and turning the handle gently behind him.

"You are terrible!" she gasped. "Don't you know the one thing I dream of has been your arrest?"

SOME instinct, the nature of which Lady Muriel declined to admit even to herself, filled her with more or less conscious relief when, finding Philip Brett out on her arrival at Scotland Yard the next morning, she was obliged to take her story instead to the Chief Inspector. He listened to her carefully, and when she had finished there was a gleam of unwilling admiration in his eyes.

"What a man!" he muttered.

She leaned back in her chair helplessly. The Chief Inspector was thinking.

"The fellow must have his moments," he reflected. "He could have been a great deal more unpleasant to you, for instance, absolutely alone at that time of night in your rooms."

Lady Muriel's cheeks were flushed, but she said nothing.

"Then he certainly did let Brett off down in Norfolk," Absolom went on. "The fellow must be uncommonly sure of himself—to think how we've hunted him all these years, and there you were alone with him barely a mile away! I'll have a man in your mews for the rest of the week, anyway. It may not do any good, but you'll feel more

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comfortable, and you'll keep in touch with us all the time. This new development may help. The only time Matthew was ever nearly caught was through an Italian woman in Rome. History might repeat itself."

Lady Muriel shivered a little. There was scarcely the exultation in her features one might have expected.

"I will keep in touch," she promised, as she took her leave.

In Whitehall she walked into Brett, and told him the whole story. Somehow or other, the second recital seemed to matter less. His face became very stern as he listened.

"There's nothing left for me except that post as traffic inspector, Lady Muriel," he declared, bitterly.

"Don't be silly!" she enjoined, patting his arm.

"For three nights following," he continued, "we visit the night clubs simply to watch for that one man. Last night he sat at the very next table. He even made a very subtle attempt to flirt with you—oh, yes, I saw him—and all the time he knew I was Brett, the Scotland Yard detective, hunting him, and I had no more idea who he was than the man in the moon. I shall ask the Chief to put another man on the job."

"Don't be absurd," she begged. "Remember what the police of every country have said: his genius for disguise is greater than that of any living actor. Here's a man whom the French Chef de Sûreté has assured us is far cleverer than Coquelin ever was. It's almost impossible to recognize a person like that."

"Nevertheless," Brett groaned, "I walked into his arms at that shooting party. I had every opportunity for studying him, and I can assure you that even now, when I know the truth, I cannot see the faintest likeness between your admirer of last night and the man who played the host to me—curse him!—at Lesser Widerness. In Norfolk he was just an ordinary country sportsman, with rather a stronger face than most, loose about the mouth, humorous eyes, hearty without being noisy, looked as though he had lived all his life in homespuns, and walked every day with a gun under his arm instead of in his hip pocket. The man last night was a perfect specimen of the aristocratic *boulevardier*—the rather cynical, immaculately turned out man-about-town. It's damnable, Lady Muriel! It isn't one man we're after—it's fifty."

"Don't lose heart, Philip," she insisted, "and listen! I didn't say a word to Mr. Absolom, but there was something I noticed which might help. It was a small thing, but you might be able to make something of it. Matthew's clothes were the very best of their kind, but I noticed that inside the collar of his overcoat, where the maker's name should have been, there was a blank piece of black satin."

"There might be something in that," Brett reflected.

"There's this much in it," she went on. "I don't believe there are half-a-dozen tailors in London who could have made an overcoat such as he was wearing, or a dress coat. If you start at the top and work through the list, you ought to be able to find out someone who orders clothes and won't have the maker's name inside."

"I'll start straight away," he promised

"Good luck to you!" she murmured, with a little pat on his arm.

She left him, and with a farewell wave of the hand swung herself on to an omnibus going westwards. A man who had been watching her from the interior of a large limousine, drawn up by the kerb on the opposite side of the way, indulged in a grimace. He spoke through the silver-mounted tube.

"Follow that omnibus," he directed.

BRETT, on paying his third call in the neighbourhood of Savile Row, met with prompt and unexpected success.

"We have several American clients," the manager explained, "who prefer us not to put the name of an English tailor in their clothes. It helps them with the Customs, I believe, but I don't think that any one of them would be of interest to you. We have another client with the same peculiarity who has always been rather a mystery to us, and with whom I hope very much you are not going to interfere."

"Why not?"

"Because he happens to be now, as he has been for the last ten years, the very best customer we have upon our books."

"You will tell me his name?" Brett begged.

"I would do so with pleasure, sir," was the polite reply, "but we do not know it."

"Not know it?" Brett repeated, staring across the table from his comfortable chair at the manager.

"That may sound extraordinary, sir," the latter continued, "but it's a fact. We have been making clothes of every sort and description for this gentleman, from sporting garments of various kinds to a Court suit, but we have never heard his name. You will wish me, no doubt, to explain the procedure."

"If you please."

"At irregular periods, but, generally speaking, every few months, we receive a telephone message from a firm of fruit

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brokers—Gonzales and Ardron, of Plumer's Buildings, Riverside Street—a district, I believe, somewhere in the vicinity of the lower wharves. We send one of our best men down there with a variety of patterns, and, either in the warehouse or on one of the steamers moored close to the wharf, our client makes his selection. He usually chooses twenty to twenty-five suits at a time, and gives us a date for trying on and a rendezvous. Sometimes it is at Cowes, once or twice it has been at Greenwich, occasionally at the warehouse in the City, or the Ritz Hotel here, but our representative has always been met, and has never had any occasion to ask for his client by name."

"Can you describe him?"

"I have often asked our man the same question," the manager acknowledged, "and he always seems a little vague about it. From a tailoring point of view, the thing that interests us chiefly is that he has an absolutely perfect figure. His clothes can be made upon a block. There is very seldom an alteration required, and although I have never seen him in my life, I should expect, if I did meet him, to see the best-dressed man in London. Apart from that, I gather that he is clean-shaven, middle-aged, and, although the name of the firm with which he seems to be associated is foreign, he is undoubtedly an Englishman. Now you would probably like to ask the fitter who waits upon him a few questions," the manager concluded, stretching out his hand towards the bell.

Brett stopped him promptly.

"There is nothing I want to know, thank you," he said, "and I would much rather that you did not mention my visit to the fitter."

The manager seemed a little doubtful.

"He's been with us for thirty years—an absolutely trustworthy fellow."

"If he were a partner in the firm I should still say the same," Brett insisted. "The man we are after is capable of giving a ten-thousand-pound bribe in the same way that we might slip a pound note into a man's hand. I should prefer your not mentioning these inquiries to anyone. What I should like to know is if you have any work on hand for your customer at the present moment."

The manager glanced at a memorandum upon his desk.

"As it happens," he confided, "our fitter—Harding, his name is—is taking eleven suits to be tried on down to Riverside Street to-morrow."

There was an ominous glitter in Brett's eyes.

"At what time?"

"He is to be at Riverside Street at half-past eleven. Our client is the most extraordinarily punctual person. To be five minutes late would be an offence, so I imagine Harding will leave here at about eleven in a taxicab, in case there should be a block anywhere."

Brett rose to his feet.

"I am immensely obliged to you, sir," he said. "Your information may be of great value to us."

"I only hope it won't mean that we are going to be robbed of our best client," was the good-humoured rejoinder. . . .

Brett returned to Scotland Yard and recounted to the Chief Inspector the result of his mission.

"It sounds promising enough," the latter admitted.

"It does," Brett agreed, without overmuch enthusiasm.

"What's wrong?"

Brett drummed lightly with his fingers upon the table. His ingenuous face was clouded; the sparkle had gone from his clear eyes.

"A slight attack of nerves, sir, I expect," he confessed. "We have so often nearly laid our hands upon this fellow. This looks promising enough, and yet——"

"You think it's a trap?"

"I think that if this is really another of his hiding-places, he'll have a wonderful get-away all provided for."

The Chief Inspector smiled.

"I dare say the get-away's there all right," he observed, "but he isn't going to have all the luck all the time. You'd better lie low for the rest of the day, Brett. I'll send some of our men down to Riverside Street who know the neighbourhood, and can get a plan of the place. Oh, by the by, here's another mysterious letter for you. It came by hand a few minutes ago."

He threw it across the desk—a narrow, violet-tinted envelope, with a typewritten address. Brett opened it languidly enough, but at the sight of the first few words he was a different man. Forgetful of his superior's presence, he swore as he flung the letter upon the table. The Chief Inspector picked it up and read:—

My dear Brett,

You really should not allow a young lady of Lady Muriel's charm and position to travel in an omnibus. Anything might happen, you know, in this intriguing city of ours.

MATTHEW.

"The nerve of the fellow!" Absolom gasped.

Brett snatched up his hat.

"I've got to make sure that she's all right," he announced. "She was going

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back to her rooms to change early for luncheon and the reception this afternoon."

The Chief Inspector nodded. He tapped the sheet of paper indulgently.

"Sardonic humour this chap seems to have," he observed, "but the rest of it's bluff, of course. Come in and get the news about five."

AT the appointed hour that evening the Chief Inspector sat impatiently awaiting the return of Philip Brett. He was so completely engrossed with the matter in hand that he did not notice the latter's disturbed demeanour when, punctually as the hour struck, he presented himself.

"Come and sit down, Brett," he invited. "Here, by the side of me. Brooks has just got back—done his work quite well. There's no doubt that Gonzales and Ardron are a firm of repute. They own two or three steamers, do genuine business, their bank report is A1, and there is nothing against either of the partners. Here's a sketch of the vicinity. You turn off Tooley Street into Riverside Street. Pretty rotten neighbourhood that, of course, and at the end of Riverside Street there are some iron gates, leading out on to a wharf extension where one of the Gonzales steamers is generally docked. These gates are open during the day-time, but can be closed with authority at any moment. Now, on the left, just before you reach these gates, there are some others, leading to ten or twelve warehouses, which face, you see, towards this open space, and the backs of which are within a few yards of the river, from which they are separated by a strip of wharf. The first of these warehouses, and the only one of any consequence, is that of Gonzales and Ardron. They have two cranes, electrically worked, and, as a matter of fact, this afternoon they were busy loading one of their steamers which is moored close to the wharf, ready for a return journey to Barcelona. Speaking generally of the whole neighbourhood and the immediate environment of the wharf, Brooks goes so far as to describe it as a criminals' paradise. There are two empty buildings adjoining the premises of Gonzales and Ardron, with half-a-dozen exits in each. Beyond this are some filthy tumble-down cottages, which are all owned by the firm of Gonzales. There are back entrances to Merton Street, and front entrances leading along an alley into Riverside Street. A very pretty little nest, it might be. There are one or two features of encouragement for us, though."

Brett nodded, without speaking. He was studying the plan.

"Every morning," his Chief went on, "there is a small crowd of loafers on the quay, in the hope of finding a job, and twenty or thirty more who lounge about in the open space at the back of Gonzales's warehouse. To-morrow that number will be slightly increased. We shall have another half-dozen out on the strip of dock, and a few hanging round the ship. Then, safely out of sight, I shall have a strongish force of men occupying at least three of the cottages, and the streets beyond that will be thoroughly patrolled."

"And the plan?"

"The fitter from the tailor will arrive by taxicab with all his parcels at about eleven-thirty, and until he has turned up there won't be the slightest sign of anything unusual. He will enter the warehouse, and as soon as he is safely inside we will pass the signal to the men who are waiting at the different places, and three or four of us will rush the warehouse. Any suggestions?"

"What about the Gonzales staff?" Brett inquired. "We shall have to take it for granted that they're in the game. How many will there be?"

"Only fourteen. We shall be nearer forty, and directly the shooting begins—if there is any—my outside men will close in. You'll want to go along, I suppose?"

"I don't think there's a living man could keep me away, sir," Brett replied, fiercely.

The Chief Inspector glanced up, and suddenly realized Brett's disturbed condition.

"What about Lady Muriel?" he asked.

"I've spent the whole afternoon looking for her. She did not return to her rooms, although, when she left, I know that she meant to go straight there. She did not appear at the reception, although they were expecting her, and she had a definite assignment there."

"My God!" Absolom muttered. "You don't think——"

"I'm not allowing myself to think," Brett interrupted. "They have called the conductor of the bus which she boarded, off duty. I am seeing him at the Bus Company's offices in half an hour."

The Chief Inspector leaned back in his chair.

"It's a queer business, but after all, Brett," he pointed out, "an abduction at eleven o'clock in the morning from a bus going from Northumberland Avenue to Bond Street isn't possible, is it?"

The telephone bell at his elbow tinkled. He took off the receiver and, after a word or two, passed it to his companion.

"Trunk call for you, Brett—put through from your room. Sounds like a lady's voice."

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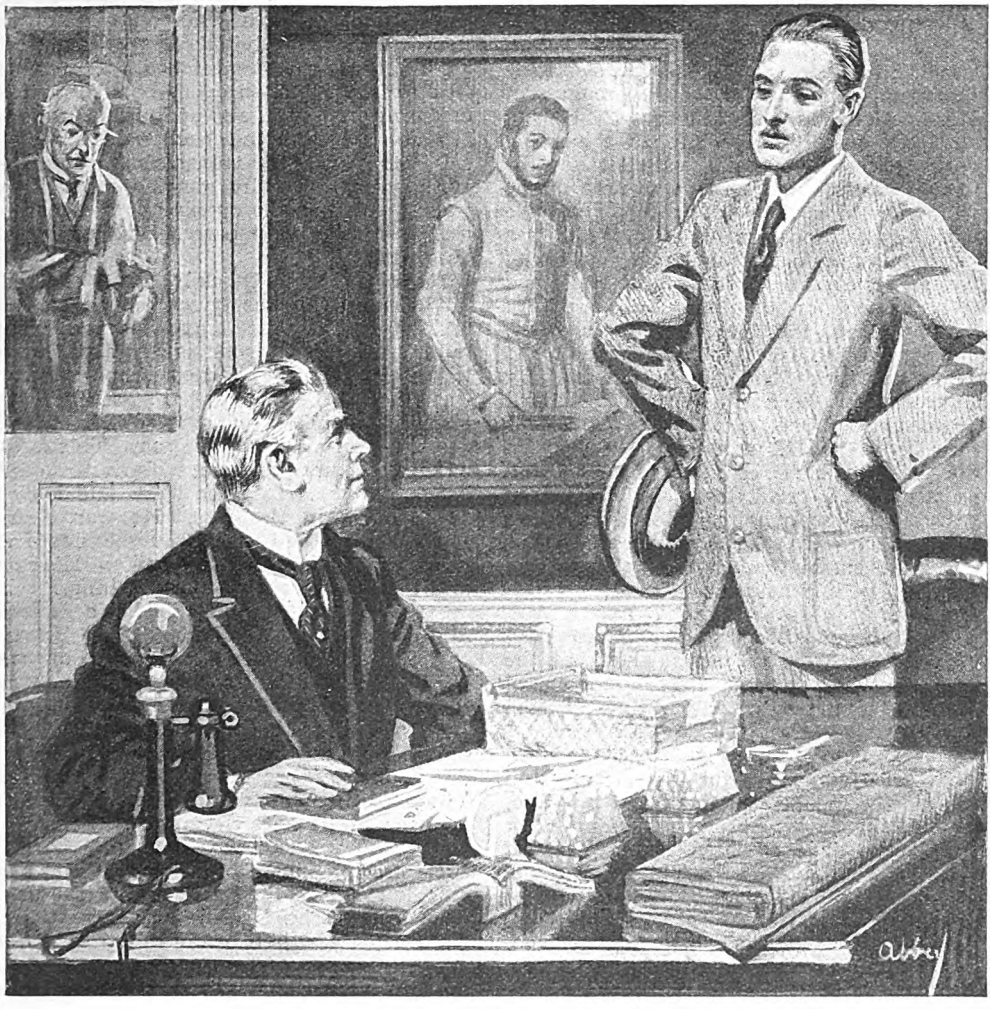

"I am immensely obliged to you, sir," Brett said. "Your information may be of great value to us."

Brett held the receiver to his ear. A torrent of tremulous words assailed him.

"This is Muriel speaking. I can't explain. I've only a few seconds. Widerness—Lesser Widerness Hall. Do you hear? Come now. Oh, quickly—quickly! It's Matthew, and I'm terrified!"

"Where are you?" Brett asked.

"On the way there. We've had a slight accident. I'm in a chemist's shop. I pretended to faint. Peter, don't delay, please. You'll need some men. The beaters have gone back there. Please—please!"

The voice died away. Absolom, who had been listening in, set down his part of the instrument.

"My God, Brett! What are we to do now?" he exclaimed.

"Stay where we are, and look for Matthew in London," was the grim reply. "It was a very good imitation of Lady Muriel's voice, but I'd never believe that Matthew or anyone connected with him would let her go into a chemist's shop and stay there long enough to telephone, if they'd once got hold of her. Besides, she happens to know that my name is Philip. I wasn't sure before, but I am now," he added, his voice gaining strength, and the light flashing once more in his eyes. "Matthew will be at Riverside Street to-morrow. If I can't take him, I'll kill him."

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AT twenty minutes to twelve precisely on the following morning a motor-car, driven at a considerable speed, turned in at the yard and stopped outside the unimposing entrance to the premises of Messrs. Gonzales and Ardron. Four men, alighting quickly, pushed open the swing door and entered the warehouse. The Chief Inspector and Brett, who were in the van, glanced rapidly around. At a table with half-a-dozen oranges before him was a large, unprepossessing-looking man of foreign appearance, dressed in what seemed to be a smock, or blue linen duster, a pair of trousers which failed to meet in the front, leaving an untidy gap, and yellow boots which apparently had not been cleaned for several days. He had a short tuft of thick beard under his chin, and the rest of his face badly needed a shave. He held an orange in one hand, and he was talking at a great pace to a small, Jewish-looking person with black, unruly hair, a hooked nose, and a bowler hat worn rakishly on one side. The latter was smoking an unpleasant cigar and listening with a smirk to the other's outpourings.

"I tell you, Isaacs," the large man declared, with only a casual glance at the new-comers, "you make more money out of my fruits than any other you buy. I been to Covent Garden. I see your stall. I see your shop in Regent Street. I know what price you make for my goods. You rob me the money you pay for them. No, sir, nothing doing. You pay my price for this cargo, or I come up to the market myself. I take a stall. I take a dozen stalls. I sell all my fruits there. Ninety shillings, and no less."

"Meaning eighty," the little man grinned.

A warehouseman in a leather apron approached the new arrivals, who were lingering upon the threshold, taking stock of their surroundings. He jerked his head towards the table.

"The guv'nor's engaged with a buyer for a few minutes," he explained. "Can I do anything for you?"

The Chief Inspector looked across at the door, upon which was printed, "*Office.*"

"Who is in there?" he inquired.

"The other guv'nor," the man replied, "but he's engaged just now."

"I'll have a word with him," Absolom decided.

They crossed the room. At the sight of the little procession Mr. Gonzales broke off in a flow of eloquence, and stared at them with his mouth wide open.

"Hi! What are you wanting?" he called out.

No one took any notice. It was Brett who threw open the door, and his hand came out of his pocket with a flash. A tall, athletic-looking man was standing in the middle of an untidy office, partly dressed and with one arm outstretched. There were clothes hanging upon every possible article of furniture, and an undoubted tailor's assistant was standing back, studying critically the hang of the trousers he was fitting. Both seemed equally startled when they turned round at the opening of the door to look down the ugly barrels of a couple of automatics.

"Put 'em up! Quick!" Brett ordered.

The man who was trying on the clothes understood at once, and obeyed. The tailor's assistant, as soon as he grasped what was expected of him, followed suit eagerly.

"What's the meaning of this?" the former demanded, swinging round. "You needn't worry about that gun. This is an unfinished pair of trousers, with no pockets."

Brett stepped into the light, and looked the speaker in the face. He was clean-shaven, with well-cut but unpleasing features, and a faintly derisive smile. His eyes met the detective's without flinching.

"I don't understand this business," he said. "What's it all about?"

Brett studied him closely, from the crown of his head to his feet. Then he turned to the tailor's assistant.

"You can put your hands down," he said. "Are you from Platt's, Savile Row?"

"I am, sir," the man replied, nervously, "and I'd like to say that I'm not used to firearms, and I hate the sight of them."

"No one's going to do you any harm," Brett assured him. "Answer this question quickly: Is this the gentleman you're used to making clothes for?"

"I never saw him before in my life," the man declared. "The things weren't made for him either, and how we'll get them to fit I don't know. I arrived here to try on my usual customer, and I was told——"

Brett sprang to the window. From outside came the sound of a siren. The steamer was moving off—already clear of the small pier head. A man leaning over the side removed a cigar from his mouth and waved his hand. It was Gonzales, a shabby cloth cap on the back of his head, a grin on his broad face. Nevertheless, inspiration came to Brett, not for the first time in his life—a thought too late. He strode to the door.

"Burton," he called out, "telephone every river police station from here to Greenwich, to stop and board steamship *Juanita*, outward bound. He's done us, sir," he groaned, turning to Absolom.

"Who?"

"Matthew—Gonzales! Blast him!" Brett cried. "What a make-up, and what an infernal nerve!"

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Burton rushed out as they hastily clambered into their car.

"No telephones here working, sir," he announced. "All wires cut."

"Get to the nearest call station," the Chief Inspector ordered.

"Have the sergeant lock up the place and put everyone under surveillance."

HALF AN HOUR later, in obedience to a sharp police whistle from a heavily-laden barge, the *Juanita* slowed down just short of the Tower Bridge, a rope ladder was thrown over the side, and four or five policemen, followed by Brett and the Chief Inspector, climbed on board. They came warily, but there was no one who seemed inclined to dispute their progress. A man who they presumed was the captain jabbered to them in Spanish. The pilot leaned over from the bridge.

"What's wrong, gentlemen?" he called out.

"We're from Scotland Yard," the Chief Inspector announced. "We want someone on board."

"What am I to do with the boat?" the pilot demanded.

"Take her back to the wharf where you came from. Can you swing her clear of the bridge?"

The pilot nodded, and resumed his place at the wheel. The captain, with a shrug of the shoulders, climbed the steps and joined him. A steward hurried up to the newcomers.

"Where's Mr. Gonzales?" Absolom inquired.

"No English," the man replied.

They pushed him on one side and descended the companion-way, leaving the rest of the men to guard the deck. The first three cabins they found empty. From the fourth Brett heard a familiar voice and shouted encouragement. The door was locked, but they forced it in a few seconds. Lady Muriel was standing there waiting for them. She held out her hands with a little sob of relief.

"You're all right?" Brett demanded.

"I'm all right," she answered. "But—Matthew! He is the devil incarnate! I was beginning to feel like that bird in the gilded cage."

She pointed to the canary who was singing lustily in a wonderful little Chinese temple hanging from the ceiling. They looked further round the room, and understood. The place was a bower of roses. On the sideboard were bowls of peaches and muscatel grapes; a great box of chocolates and half-a-dozen new novels lay upon the sofa. She pointed almost hysterically to a steamer trunk and a dressing case, both of them marked with her initials.

"My things!" she cried. "I haven't been near home, and I have the key in my pocket."

There was the sound of water being churned up as the steamer swung round. Brett, listening intently, drew his automatic once more from his pocket. The Chief Inspector stepped back into the corridor.

"You haven't been home since when?" Brett asked, breathlessly.

"Yesterday morning."

"And since then?"

"You saw me get into the omnibus," she recounted. "Well, it put me down in Bond Street, and just as I stepped on to the pavement an elderly gentleman, looking exactly like a doctor, left his car, spoke to me as though we were old friends, and told me that my cousin, Millie Trotman, who was coming up to lunch with me yesterday and going on to the reception afterwards, had met with a slight accident and was lying in a hospital—could he take me there? Of course I was fool enough to believe him, but, after all, why not? I didn't imagine that anyone else in the world knew that Millie was coming, and the doctor would have deceived even you. I got into the car, felt a prick on the back of my hand a moment afterwards—and woke up here."

"What about Matthew?" Brett demanded, fiercely.

"I only saw him for a moment this morning," she replied. "He came in to make his apologies, he said. We should have plenty of time for explanations when we got out to sea!"

Brett drew a sigh of relief and turned away.

"You won't mind if I hurry off?" he begged. "I must be in it when they take him."

She called him back.

"Take who?"

"Matthew—Gonzales, if you like. We tumbled to his disguise just too late."

She shook her head a little pitifully.

"My dear Philip," she expostulated, "you don't really suppose, when he realized that you were coming after him, that he was going to stay on board, do you? We weren't fifty yards away from the wharf when off he went in a small dinghy. They picked him up on another steamer. I couldn't see her name, but I believe he left her, too, from the other side, in a motor launch. He could have landed anywhere between here and Greenwich by this time."

The tide had begun to turn. All manner of steamers and craft of different sorts were lumbering down the river. Brett watched them through the porthole, and there was

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fury in his heart. As far as one could see the procession of boats went on.

"And he is there!" he muttered in despair. "He is either in some safe hiding-place on shore, or he is on one of them, smiling at us. He's right. We're a pack of idiots. We work like machines till the last moment, and then he just slips through our fingers as he pleases. Gonzales! Why, I can hear him now, quarrelling over the price of those oranges. Damn him!"

There was a knock at the door. A young man, wearing the linen jacket of a steward, entered, the Chief Inspector at his heels.

"Note for gentleman," the former announced.

Brett tore open the envelope with a curse still upon his lips.

'My dear Brett," he read, *"I have forgiven you a great deal, but this time I am angry. You have spoilt what I know so well would have been the most wonderful episode of my life; you have robbed me of my divine picture, of all my new clothes, and you have prevented my ever going again to the best tailor in the world. Why on earth didn't you play the knight errant and go down to Lesser Widerness Hall?*

"Keep your gun handy from now on, little man. There's trouble coming.

"MATTHEW."

The Chief Inspector read the letter; Lady Muriel read it, with a little shiver; Brett tore it savagely into pieces. Then Lady Muriel laid a consoling hand upon the shoulders of the two men. She looked towards the door of the cabin to be sure it was closed, opened a cupboard, drew out a long roll of canvas, and let it fall slowly open fold by fold.

"Hi! What are you wanting?" Mr. Gonzales called out. No one took any notice.

"The Gainsborough!" Brett exclaimed.

She nodded gravely.

"He was right about the likeness, too, I suppose," she observed. "It is the portrait of my great-great-aunt, Lady Amelia Holcombe."

The two men studied the picture for a moment in silence. The girl's face under the large hat seemed curiously alive. The lips with their faint mockery, the eyes with their wistful depths were both re-

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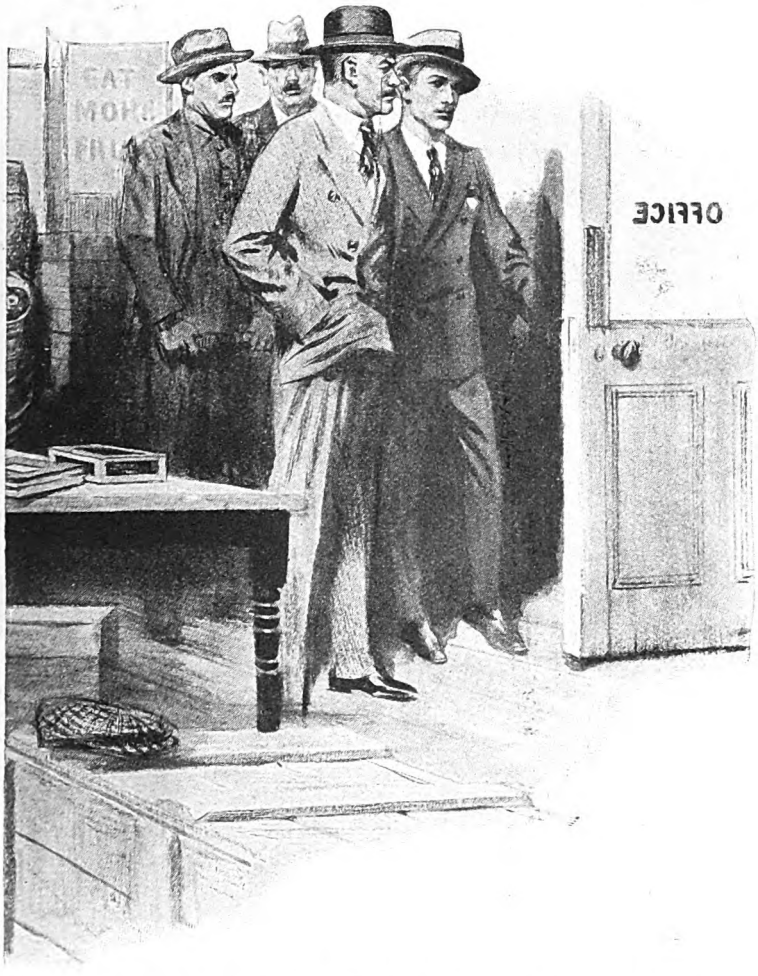
miniscent of the girl who was holding the canvas.

"Matthew's first present to me," she said, and again the curve of those pictured lips was reproduced in her own. "He stopped here for one moment when he knew that he had lost and that you were close on his heels. He looked at the picture. I suppose I was a fool, but I only wanted to get rid of him—I held it out. He shook his head. 'I never take back presents,' he said. 'Soon we shall be admiring it together.' Then he hurried off, and a minute later I heard the boat leave the ship."

"A wonderful gesture!" the Chief Inspector murmured.

"At our expense, as usual," Brett added, bitterly.



Lady Muriel laid her hand upon his arm.

"Please don't be disheartened," she begged. "Remember that what you have done is a great triumph. You have driven him from his most important hiding-place. You have made him a fugitive once more, you have rescued me, the victim of an abduction, and you have regained the picture. Surely that isn't a bad morning's work?"

"Lady Muriel is right," the Chief Inspector agreed. "The picture is a great find."

Brett smiled at her gratefully.

"All the same," he pointed out, "the triumph is yours, not ours. It was you who gave us the clue which enabled us to track him down through his tailors, and it is you who have the picture. We are the mugs who let him go. The whole of the credit really belongs to you."

"Cheer up," Lady Muriel enjoined, hopefully. "So far you've had the bad luck, and I've had the good. Believe me, the end isn't so far off."

The Chief Inspector looked at her curiously.

"You have something to tell us!"

She nodded mysteriously.

"I know something about Matthew," she confided. "Don't ask me what it is at this moment. Tell me the date?"

"The nineteenth of October," Brett replied.

She leaned towards the two men, and her voice carried conviction.

"Upon the second of November," she prophesied, "you shall take Matthew."

(*Next month: "The Stubborn End."*)

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the SILVER SCREEN

Furber

The United States alone has twenty thousand cinemas, and fifty million patrons pay two million pounds every week for admission to them. Thomas Edison only invested five thousand pounds in his motion-picture process, yet to-day the money invested in American motion pictures is more than three hundred million pounds. In 1913 only thirty-two million feet of film was exported from the United States; in 1924 it had grown to one hundred and eighty million; last year it was two hundred and fifty million. American pictures are to-day shown in sixty-eight countries, and the sub-titles, or captions, are translated into close on forty languages.

A successful motion-picture writer can claim that for every one person who attends a performance of a popular play, over one hundred flock to a popular film. It is the same with salaries: twenty or thirty thousand a year is the by no means unusual stipend of a successful writer for the films.

Dorothy Farnum, whose earnings average four or five hundred pounds weekly.

Frances Marion, who earns close on eight hundred pounds a week.

A most curious fact is that, while there are no very successful women dramatists—or only a very few—successful women writers for the screen probably outnumber the men. At the head of a long list is Frances Marion, who adapted "Stella Dallas"—the picture which lifted our own Ronald Colman into stardom — with her earning capacity of something approaching eight hundred pounds per

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week. Close upon her heels comes the beautiful Dorothy Farnum with a beggarly four or five hundred; while such brilliant women as Agnes Christine Johnson, Jeanie Macpherson, Lenore Coffee, Agnes Duer Miller, Florence Ryerson, Sada Cowan, Katharine Hilliker, Louise Long, Doris Anderson, and two brilliant Englishwomen—Gladys Unger and Josephine Lovett, now resident in Hollywood—have to struggle along as best they can on a paltry ten or fifteen thousand a year.

Harry Behn was only a boy when he adapted "The Big Parade" and made his fame and fortune; and behind the making of this money-spinner lies a romantic story of triumphant youth. In the U.S.A. they have supervisors of pictures—men with a sense of "What the public wants," who supervise the "shooting" of four or five pictures at a time and who are held solely responsible for success or failure. The supervisor of "The Big Parade" was a Mr. Irving Thalberg—a youngster of twenty-one or twenty-two, considered by many to be the greatest genius in the motion-picture world of to-day; yet the public do not know him by name, unless perchance they recollect his recent marriage to the beautiful Canadian film star, Miss Norma Shearer.

Harry Behn "scenarized" "The Big Parade"; King Vidor directed it; John Gilbert and Renée Adorée, who little imagined at the time that this picture was destined to raise them to Olympian heights of stardom, played the principal parts in it; Karl Dane—now also a star—made his *début* in it, and Irving Thalberg supervised it. "The Big Parade" was never intended to be a super-picture; it had no very famous names in the cast, and it was started as one of those many cut-to-pattern pictures which are made every year in the U.S.A. for general distribution and one-week runs in the picture palaces of the world.

One morning, very early, young Mr. Thalberg strolled into his private projection room and demanded to be shown the progress of "The Big Parade" to date. The picture was then only half complete, but Thalberg, with his almost uncanny flair for public entertainment, recognized at once that here was a masterpiece in embryo. The making of the picture was held up for a few days while Thalberg poured more money into it. Everything was to be bigger—bigger guns, more men, more horses, more spectacle, more of everything; and then the great "Joe" Farnham was brought in to write the sub-titles.

Photo] Sada Cowan. [Bull.

The result we all know. "The Big Parade" cost about six hundred thousand dollars to make. It took over one million dollars in receipts in one single year in one single theatre in New York alone, and it will eventually be shown in thousands of theatres. The profits may eventually run into millions—ten millions may not be too extravagant an estimate.

Irving Thalberg went coolly on to supervise the completion of the gigantic "Ben-Hur"; John Gilbert became the greatest star in America, and he, King Vidor, and Harry Behn continued with their collaboration in the making of the beautiful "La Bohème."

Dorothy Farnum has done much brilliant work for the screen, and, had she not elected to earn her living by her pen, she might have become as great a movie star as the famous Greta Garbo—unknown when first

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Aggie Herring as "Mrs. O'Brien."

Cunningham, author of three of the greatest successes in the history of motion pictures—"The Covered Wagon," "Don Q," and "The Black Pirate." Jack Cunningham's most recent work, "Captain Salvation," has added to his already considerable reputation.

The greatest producer of thrillers and shockers—the Edgar Wallace of the screen—is Waldemar Young, one of the gentlest, quietest, and pleasantest persons I met in California. Waldemar Young was responsible for "The Unholy Three," a picture in which Lon Chaney made one of his first and greatest successes, and in which our British Victor Maclaglen made his first mark in American motion pictures and laid a foundation which was soon to make of him one of the greatest motion-picture stars in the world. "The Unholy Three" were a trio of desperate criminals, one of whom was a tiny dwarf who dressed in infant's clothes and who was pushed about in a perambulator by Lon Chaney, disguised as an old woman. Victor Maclaglen was the third member of this unholy trio, and he eventually got himself chewed to pieces by a gigantic ape which Lon Chaney led around with him on the end of a string. Waldemar Young followed up "The Unholy Three" with "The Blackbird," a brilliant shocker in which Lon Chaney also appeared.

It is said of A. P. Younger that if he is asked for an original motion-picture story in the morning, he can—at a pinch—deliver it in the afternoon. He is known to have written over thirty motion-picture stories in the last five years, and among them are successes like "Brown of Harvard," "Husbands and Lovers," and many others.

But no list of the great writers for the films can be complete without the inclusion of one Hollywood Englishman—Edmund Goulding, author, director, actor, novelist, singer, mimic, producer, artist, and designer. Goulding writes his own picture stories, adapts them for the screen, and more often than not directs them. He it is who was responsible for "The Fool," "Sun Up," "The Dancers," "Gerald Cranston's Lady," "Havoc," "The Beautiful City," "Sally, Irene, and Mary," "Paris," and "Women Love Diamonds." Edmund Goulding bears a very close resemblance to Sir Gerald du Maurier, and, indeed, can give a life-like impersonation of him. Goulding has a passion for accuracy in characterization and make-up. Look what he did to Aggie Herring for "Sally, Irene, and Mary."

With the dawn of a new era in British pictures, we find one or two brilliant men who work in their own country and who are busily engaged here. Four of them come to my mind—Graham Cutts, Alfred Hitchcock, Anthony Asquith, and Jack Buchanan. Graham Cutts is a brilliant director—he was turning out successful British pictures when the industry here was at its lowest ebb—and he can take a hand at adaptation with the best of them. He has a long list of screen triumphs to his credit, beginning with "The Wonderful Story"—his first picture—which he made many years ago at a cost of only one thousand pounds, and continuing with the brilliant "Paddy-the-Next-Best-Thing," "Woman to Woman,"

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" The White Shadow," " Dangerous Virtue," " The Blackguard," " The Rat," and " The Triumph of the Rat."

" Woman to Woman " was an enormous success. It swept through America at a time when British pictures were almost unheard of there, and it was an even greater triumph in our own country. It was in " Woman to Woman " that the now-famous British screen " star," Clive Brook, made his first leap into prominence. No sooner had " Woman to Woman " reached America than Hollywood began to bid for Brook's services. Offers came rushing over, and shortly afterwards Brook sailed for California, there to consolidate a career in which he has never looked back, and which has led him to-day to the very top of the tree.

Shortly after this, Graham Cutts produced " The Rat," and finally established Ivor Novello as the outstanding motion-picture " star " in England. The success of " The Rat " was so instantaneous and complete that the great film public began to clamour for more " Rat " pictures. But there were no more " Rats," the original picture having been adapted from the successful, and long-running, play by " David L'Estrange " — the pen names of Mr. Novello himself and Miss Constance Collier (Mrs. L'Estrange). Graham Cutts, not to be outdone, always the loyal servant of his vast public, called in a collaborator, rolled up his sleeves, and sat down to write a second " Rat " story for himself. The result was " The Triumph of the Rat," and another triumph for Graham Cutts.

Alfred Hitchcock has jumped into the front rank with " The Ring " and " The Farmer's Wife." He was at one time assistant director to Graham Cutts; to-day, at twenty-seven years of age, he is one of Britain's cleverest and youngest directors, and he, too, is a maker of stars. In " The Ring," which he directed and also helped to write, he introduced to the screen Carl Brisson and Gordon Harker, and it was in this picture that Harker established himself at a bound as one of the cleverest character comedians in motion pictures.

Anthony Asquith is practically a newcomer to the films, and no one can yet say how far he will go. His first picture was " Shooting Stars," and it was the best British picture I have seen. He may one day become an outstanding figure in the cinema world of England. For motion pictures are a curious business, and they are in a curious stage. Hundreds of pictures have to be made yearly, and of these over ninety per cent. must be plain, simple, homely stories, cleverly made and easily

Photo [*Naiga.*

Graham Cutts, the English producer, who has a long list of screen triumphs to his credit.

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told; for it must always be remembered that by far the greater number of film lovers come from the suburbs and villages—simple people remote from the theatre and concert hall to whom a weekly visit to the local cinema is a habit and a religion. It is with the remaining ten per cent. of the world's output of pictures that experiments can be made and brilliant chances taken. But the big fortunes have been built up out of "programme pictures"—stories for the masses which the masses can understand.

No mention of British motion pictures can be complete without a word or two about the acknowledged king of our musical-comedy stage, Mr. Jack Buchanan. It is a great loss to the industry that he is not able to devote more time to the films, for his picturesque appearance and brilliant power to amuse must one day—if he can spare the time—place him in the forefront of movie "stars." He is not merely a great comedian; he has an extraordinary genius for direction and *décor*. Glance at a programme of one of his plays and you will see that in addition to adorning the stellar *rôle* he personally produces and stages the play, arranges all the dances, and usually designs some of the scenery. Mr. Buchanan is a great producer. One of these days he will produce himself in a film, and when he does it will be unconquerable. I was in Hollywood at the time when a tremendous long-term contract, at an amazing salary, was offered to him by one of the greatest living producers of films—Mr. Cecil B. de Mille. Let us hope that one of these days pictures will win him away from the stage for sufficient time to enable him to make a brilliant comedy or two in his own happy vein.

Photo [L.N.A.

Jack Buchanan, of musical-comedy fame, whom Cecil B. de Mille tried to lure to the screen by the offer of an amazing salary.

There are two other young Englishmen, Mr. Geoffrey Barkas and Mr. Michael Barringer, whose work is exciting a great deal of speculation and interest.

In conclusion, let me acknowledge that no story of the prominent men behind the motion-picture screen can be complete without some mention of the writers of sub-titles or captions. The greatest of these are the big four—Joseph White Farnham, George Marion, Jun., Ralph Spence, and Malcolm Stuart Boylan—whose united salaries run into sixty thousand pounds a year. Title-writing is a highly-specialized work, for often a title-writer has to call up in a dozen words a pen-picture of some character which will remain in the audience's mind throughout the entire showing of a film. A few of these word-pictures, describing various types of persons, are worth quoting: "The fire in his eyes was quenched by the water on his brain." "He looks like an accident going to some place to happen." "He did not know whether Richard offered his kingdom for a horse, or the horse offered a kingdom for Richard." "He was one of those men his father warned him against." "People who live in fast blouses shouldn't show bones." "He not only ate his food, he wore some of it." "He once fought a one-armed man and was knocked out by an empty sleeve," and "He was a gentleman to his finger-prints."

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THE SLAVE SWASHEM

By

Ralph de Rohan

Illustrated by
RENÉ BULL

IN the City of Bagdad, many thousands of years ago, was a mighty building, the shop or stores of a merchant whose name was inscribed over the portals in Arabic, so that the passers-by who might be customers could read and know that the proprietor was Hash Bash. There were many departments, where one might buy soap or dog's-flesh, owls or carpet-slippers with the toes turned up, jars of honey or—but I can tell it you best in the words of the great black slave, Swashem, who stood all day at the great entrance and sang :—

"*Old Abu Hash Bash (may his tribe increase!)*
Sells all things wholesale—also by the piece :
Excellent food and drink, goat's flesh and broth,
And wondrous sherbet, fizzy with snow-white froth.

"*Rare ivories, gold and silver, jewelled rings,*
To suit the tastes of emperors and kings :
Roses of Sharon, camels, peacocks bright—
(Honey in jars? Yes, Madam—on the right!)"

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Thus the slave would chant in sing-song fashion all day long at the great entrance, making up poetries which gave great joy to the children of the gutter, who, from a safe distance, would utter odd cries and make wry faces.

Now it happened that one day the sun shone more so than usual, while the bees hummed with a great drowsiness and the crickets and the grasshoppers made slumbersome noises. Wherefore the song of Swashem became as the song of one who dozes at the gateway to the Land of Nod, and it sounded, as 't were, thuswise :—

" *'m— 'm— 'm— 'm—,—'m —'m, 'm 'm, 'm 'm, 'm 'm 'm (snore), grch, umph, ph.*"

Then with a great effort did he open his eyes and call himself, saying that it was time to get up and that he would be late unless he hurried. And when he had stretched himself and yawned, he discovered he was not abed but at the great entrance of the stores. Then he shook himself, half ashamed because he had slept at his post, and began hurriedly to chant his song, so hurriedly that bits of it got mixed—like this :—

" *Buy, buy, buy, come buy, come buy—*
Freshly gathered turtles' tails from the woods of Why,
Jars of new-laid honey from the——

" from the—from the—— Where *do* jars of honey new-laid come from ? " he asked himself ; and then the further question : " Are turtles' tails gathered in the woods of Why ? " And, as he could not answer either question, he banged his head against the gate-post to clear his brain.

But the gate-post was made of burnished copper, so bright that you could see your face in it. Swashem had always been very proud of it and used to come early every morning to polish it, so that it was brighter than ever. Swashem, stepping back to give his head an extra bang, caught sight of his reflection.

At the same moment an idea perched on his shoulder and whispered itself into his brain. Swashem thought it was a good idea and adopted it.

" I wonder if it will work ? " he said to himself. " The wise man who passed by the other day said the post was a magic one. Anyway, I'll try."

And he did.

Listen ! Lean closer and attend carefully !

Swashem stood straight in front of the magic gate-post and saw himself so clearly that his reflection was almost more like him than he was himself. That, of course, was part of the magic. But not all ; oh, dear, no ! The most magic part was this : that if the person who polished the post, polished the post perfectly, persistently, and patiently, without leaving a single smudge, for a whole year, he could leave his reflection at the post whilst he himself went off elsewhere to do whatsoever pleased him.

SWASHEM, remembering this magic which the wise man had told him, walked away from the post. Then, from the other side of the street, he looked back—and laughed. " The magic works ! " he said, for he saw that his reflection was carrying on properly. Yes, his reflection stood there in the post, and was doing just what he would have been doing. A beggar passed by and Swashem, feeling wondrous glad, let fall a coin into the beggar's hand. As he did so, he heard the clink of a falling coin. It had fallen from the hand of his reflection to the ground, and lay there.

He thought very hard ; then he dropped another coin into the beggar's hand. Again his reflection let fall a coin.

When the beggar had passed on, Swashem dropped a third coin, this time to the ground ; and his reflection did the same. Swashem picked up his coin, but the reflection, being in the polished post, could not bend itself out, so his coin lay on the ground.

Swashem crossed the road and picked up the three coins.

" Thank you, O brother ! " he said to his reflection.

" Nay, there is no cause ! " replied the latter.

" Can you do some more of this ? " asked Swashem.

" As much as you like. As often as you drop a coin, I shall drop one," replied the reflection.

" Splendid ! " said Swashem ; and he went to the middle of the road and dropped the four coins, whereupon his reflection dropped four. Swashem went and picked them up, adding them to his four, so that he had now eight. He repeated the process, making sixteen, then thirty-two, sixty-four, a hundred and twenty-eight, and so on until he had a huge heap of coins.

" This comes of giving money to a beggar," he thought as he continued the game.

The heap of money grew and grew and grew.

Then Swashem had another idea. He would buy his freedom and go into the profession of being rich. Quite a change after standing so long at the great entrance of the stores of Hash Bash and chanting poetries. There was enough money in the heap now to buy his freedom, but he could not carry it all. And he could not leave the heap of money lying in the road while he

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went to see Hash Bash about the matter of his freedom.

Suddenly a third idea came to him and he adopted it too.

This was the idea—to change all this copper money for gold.

Just then he observed one of the children of the gutter approaching with eyes big as saucers with wonder at the sight of the great heap of money. Swashem beckoned him.

"Go, microbe of the dusty gutter," he said: "go even to the abode of Ali Squeezem, the money-changer, and pray him to come hither with speed. If he comes more than speedily, thou shalt have several pieces of money for thy pains."

The child of the gutter sped swiftly, and in less than the shake of a turtle's tail returned, followed by Ali Squeezem, who carried, as usual, a bag of money.

"How many pieces of gold wilt thou give me for this heap?" asked Swashem.

"One piece and one only," said Ali Squeezem: "and, if thou dost not agree, I will tell the Grand Vizier you have stolen

Thus the streets of Bagdad became littered with gold.

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this heap of money from me. Nor will it matter what you say, for no one will believe you, who are but a big black slave."

Swashem knew this to be true. He thought a moment and then said, " I agree. Give me one piece of gold and do thou take this heap of money."

Ali Squeezem paid him the one piece of gold, gathered up as much of the copper as he could carry, and hired children of the gutter to carry the rest.

Swashem sat down and thought hard, gazing the while at the gold coin.

" Why," he thought, " is gold worth so much ? "

Suddenly he understood why. It was because there was not enough to go round, so everybody wanted it, and it was rare and valuable. But supposing everybody had lots and lots ? What then ? Why, it would then be worth very little—not more than the dust in the road, of which there was always so much that no one wanted any.

" Ha ! " said Swashem, and then : " Ho ! Methinks that before long Ali Squeezem will sorrow greatly because he cheated me ! "

Then he started dropping his gold coin, the which his reflection did too. And by and by he had once more a mighty heap, but this time it was all of gold. And all day long, as long as there was enough light for his reflection to be visible in the magic post, he continued, and the heap grew and grew and grew.

Then he borrowed a shovel so that he might work faster and make yet more gold. And to everyone who passed he gave as much gold as he or she liked to take. So, before night fell, everybody in Bagdad was as rich as a king, and they all came back again and again for more.

On the morrow Swashem continued to make heaps of gold, and all the people gathered in wealth beyond their wildest dreams. And the next day was the same, and the next, and the next. Thus the streets of Bagdad became littered with gold, and in the end no one would even bother to pick it up. For gold was no longer rare. It was as common as the dust of the highway, and it was no longer valuable. In fact, it was worthless.

This state of things was very awkward, because it was now so difficult to buy anything. If you wanted, for instance, a leg of goat or a glass of sherbet, you had to exchange something for it, perhaps a chair or a sofa or a bed. Gold would no longer buy anything.

ALI SQUEEZEM was properly punished, but, curiously enough, Swashem suffered too. Like everyone else, he could not buy food with gold, so he had to go back to his job at the entrance to the stores, and once more he chanted his poetries. And when people wanted to give him tips, he asked for food and useful things. One lady gave him a flute, which he couldn't play, and an elderly gentleman tipped him a performing serpent, which was of hardly any use to him till he bartered it to a conjurer for a string of sausages of the same pattern.

And the end of it all was that everybody and everything had to begin all over again from the beginning, and a pretty nice muddle it all was !

But Swashem went on happily with his chanting at the stores. This sort of thing:—

" Here we sell soup and here we sell fishes,
So bring in your bowls and bring in your dishes :
Here we sell this, and here we sell that ;
Our goat's milk is good for both you and your cat."

And so on and so on.

And sometimes he chortled, thinking how he, a slave, had made everybody poor by giving them too much money.

But he was contented, and never again—at least, not for a long time—did he polish the post. He let it get tarnished so that his reflection appeared in it no more.

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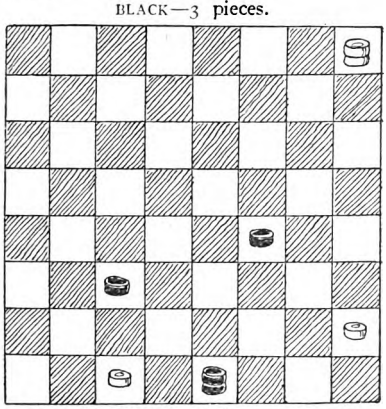
PERPLEXITIES.

By HENRY E. DUDENEY.

928.—EASY DRAUGHTS.

I AM asked to give another Draughts problem, so here is an instructive and pretty position by H. D. Lyman of New York. Can you find a way of winning for Black?

BLACK—3 pieces.



WHITE—3 pieces.

Black to move and win.

929.—SQUARES AND CUBES.

IN our issues for November-December, 1925, our puzzle No. 778, under the above title, required the finding of two different numbers the difference of whose squares would equal a cube and the difference of whose cubes would equal a square. A correspondent in British Columbia has just asked for the solution to this, but as he was referring to it entirely from memory he gives it as the sums of the two numbers and not the differences. So here is a variation of the puzzle that may interest the reader.

Find two different numbers such that the sum of their squares shall equal a cube and the sum of their cubes equal a square.

930.—AN OLD ENIGMA.

HERE is an enigma in the old manner. Can you make sense of it?

REBELLION REBELLION

In the year 1793

FRANCE

~~MONARCHY~~

LAW THE

RELIGION

REBELLION REBELLION

931.—AN OLD CARD TRICK.

IT is an old puzzle to arrange the thirteen cards of a suit (say all the diamonds) so that we can proceed as follows: Holding the reduced pack face downwards transfer one at a time to the bottom the three top cards, saying A-C-E. Then the next card to be placed on the table must be the Ace. Then transfer to the bottom T-W-O (3 cards) and place the next card on the table—the 2. Next transfer T-H-R-E-E (5 cards) and put the next on the table—the 3—and so on through the reduced pack, spelling the Knave K-N-A-V-E (5 cards) and not J-A-C-K (4 cards). The Queen will, of course, be 5 cards and the King 4. The puzzle is so to arrange the reduced pack that this will work throughout correctly.

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

923.—THE KING'S MARCH.

IN the simple case of seven moves the King can first move to three squares in the second row, writing in 1 1 1 in these squares. He can then proceed to five squares in the third row, where, by the addition of the possible entrances from the second row, you can write in 1 2 3 2 1. And so on by addition till the final 393. In the case of the eight moves we can regard the extra move as always taken in a horizontal direction. If this extra move is taken in the first row five squares in the second row will be numbered 1 1 2 1 1, in the third row 1 2 4 4 4 2 1, and so on until we reach the eighth square in 713 moves. If that extra move be taken in the second row we shall get 1 1 2 1 1 in that row, 1 2 4 4 4 2 1 in the next row, and so on. There are thus 713 ways for every row in which we take that extra move, and $8 \times 713 = 5704$ is the correct number of ways of making the march.

924.—EXPRESSING 24.

HERE are four different cases:— $\frac{|4 \times 4}{4}$, $\frac{|5-5}{5}$, $(6 \times 6) \times \dot{6}$, $\sqrt{9}\,(9-\dot{9})$. The factorial sign is always allowed in these cases, but in two of the examples it is not required. I have not found any solutions for the digits 1 and 7.

925.—A NEW MAGIC SQUARE.

THE solution explains itself. The columns, rows, and two diagonals all add up alike to 6726, and nine of each of the figures 1, 2, 3, 4 have been employed.

2243	1341	3142
3141	2242	1343
1342	3143	2241

926.—HIDDEN QUOTATION.

BY changing one letter in each word in their order we get:—OF IS MAN FATHER CHILD THE THE, which re-arranged become THE CHILD IS FATHER OF THE MAN. This is from Wordsworth's "*My heart leaps up.*"

927.—THE EGG CABINET.

SAY the number of drawers is n. Then there will be $2n-1$ strips one way and $2n-3$ strips the other, resulting in $4n^2-4n$ cells and $4n-4$ strips. Thus in the twelfth drawer we shall get 23 and 21 strips (44 together) and 528 cells. This applies to all drawers except the second, where we may have any number of strips one way and a single one the other. So 1 and 1 will here serve (a single strip is not admissible because "intersecting" was stipulated). There are thus only 262 strips in all and 524 cells (not 264 and 528).

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The Foolishness of Mr. Amagee

By
EDGAR and MARGARET JEPSON

Illustrated by
S. TRESILIAN

"KIND of noisy, ain't it?" said Mr. Amagee.

"Sure, pop," said Miss Amagee in careless accents, without raising her eyes from the rifle she was cleaning.

Mr. Amagee gazed wistfully at the glare of the great fire in the forest glade, in which a gathering of many scores of Shilluks was celebrating time-old rites, for it was midsummer eve and the moon was bright. Their barbaric chanting now and again rose to a frenzied yelling that made the night sinister, and the drumming of the tom-toms was like the thudding of a great heart, and its rhythm troubled the spirits of the listeners with a strange oppression. It did not, however, trouble greatly the spirit of Mr. Amagee, for he was possessed by an overwhelming desire to take a photograph of the worshippers in the middle of their rites and add it to his amazing collection of photo-cards of the ends of the world and curious things that happen in them. Now and again a group, or a segment of a ring of grotesque dancing figures, silhouetted against the glare, whetted that desire.

Presently his face set in a quiet determination, and he said quietly: "I'm darned if I don't go to that party!"

Miss Amagee turned her sombre eyes on him quickly, and said: "You'll sure be darned if you do, pop. Besides, you can't take any photo by the light of those fires."

"I was thinking that maybe a magnesium flash——" he said, paused, and added in a deprecating tone: "Of course, it might give those niggers a jolt."

Miss Amagee sat up straight and looked at him. "Mean to tell me you aim to walk in on that Sunday-school *fête* and fire a flash?" she said in a tone of astonished disapproval.

"I guess they'd be tickled to death," said her father with a touch of stubbornness.

"Death? If anybody died it wouldn't be those niggers," said Miss Amagee, and her lips set a little thinner and an expression of colder disapprobation filled her small and piquant face. "You cut it out, pop. It ain't worth it. We gotta get to Khartoum to find Ginger Gupp right away, an' if those niggers didn't kill you outright they'd quite likely beat you up so that you couldn't get about for a month."

"Maybe they would," said Mr. Amagee in the reluctant accents of one who abandons a cherished desire.

Miss Amagee was sleepy and she yawned. They had driven all through the long, hot day in their flivver over this unmapped country of the Upper Nile. She was more than ready for sleep.

Nevertheless, she felt a slight pang at having forbidden her father the desire of his heart, and said: "It would sure be fine to get a photo, pop, but I guess it would be plumb crazy to try."

"Sure it would," said Mr. Amagee in ready agreement. "Let's be turning in."

In less than five minutes Miss Amagee stretched herself out on her blankets to sleep; the drumming and the yelling did not cease, but soon she was breathing as sweetly and as evenly as a child in a comfortable nursery.

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She had not been sleeping ten minutes when Mr. Amagee rose, his face no longer resigned, but uncommonly alert. He stole to the flivver, took from its back seat his camera and tin of magnesium powder, then slunk noiselessly through the trees towards the dancing glow of the Shilluks' fire.

Miss Amagee slept peacefully on and did not awake till the first glimmer of dawn. She stretched herself and then had a quite distinct impression that something was wrong. Something was wrong. The fire had died down to a dull glow, but it was bright enough to show her that her father was nowhere near it. She went quickly to the flivver to find that the camera had gone, and it was on the instant plain that the passion of the collector had been too much for her father and he had gone to get his photo-card.

She muttered an unfilial phrase, picked up her rifle, and stole through the trees towards the glade of the festival. There was no longer any sound of man, only the noises of the forest. The glade was empty in a dull haze from the smouldering embers of the great fire. Here and there on the ground lay a scrap of a head-dress or a charm, and on the edge of the circle trampled round the fire she found the lid of the tobacco tin in which her father had kept the magnesium powder. But she found no other trace of him.

Presently she found the trail through the forest along which the Shilluks had come to the festival and gone from it. She followed it cautiously and very slowly for a couple of miles, peering into the depths of the denser thickets and down the long arcades on her left and right which ended in darkness among the trees. In spite of her consuming anxiety, she was wise enough to go no farther. The trail was becoming fainter as parties of the celebrants had turned off to the east and west to their villages. Her father might be with any of those parties.

She returned more quickly to the deserted glade of the festival and searched the forest round it for more traces of him, but found none. She went back to the camp and made a meal, and waited there for him to return till the afternoon. Then, since alone she could do nothing to help him, she packed their outfit into the back of the car and started for Kuala, the nearest Government post.

BIMBASHI BRIGGARD, the officer at Kuala, ruled a district of about eight thousand square miles, with the help of three companies of Askaris. He lived in a small but comfortable bungalow on a hill which was high for the district. The Bimbashi was a cheerful young man; the responsibility of ruling those thousands of square miles did not weigh upon him heavily, and the vapours of the papyrus swamp did not damp his spirits, for the leave was good, the shooting was excellent, and during the months he was on duty some fellow-sportsman would be staying with him for the shooting and relieving his loneliness.

The fellow-sportsman of the moment was his cousin, Colonel Grosvenor, a landowner in England, an important political official at Cairo, who was taking a holiday from the perpetual struggle with intriguers that keeps that country so unrestful. He had been shooting on the shores of the Victoria Nyanza and come northwards to shoot with his young cousin in the Upper Nile country. As chance had had it, at Potter's Gap on the shores of the Nyanza he had met the Amagees and had disapproved of them.

He had disapproved especially of Miss Amagee—not of her piquant face or eyes of the blue of a thrush's egg against the clear tan of her cheeks and brow, or of her shooting, which was wonderful, but of her dress and manner, that sureness of herself, that almost manly air of being able to cope easily with the difficulties and dangers of the wild country she and her father were traversing on their way to Khartoum in search of a compatriot of the appealing name of Ginger Gupp.

It was odd that she should have made so deep an impression on him, for he had little use for women, and though he was tall, slim, muscular, and hard, with a face of considerable distinction and fine grey eyes, women had little use for him. There was a coldness in his attitude to them that repelled them; that was perhaps the reason why at Potter's Gap Miss Amagee had dubbed him "Stiff-faced Stephen." None the less he had vaguely in his mind an ideal woman, a well-born, nicely brought up, pretty, pleasant English girl, a fitting mistress of Green Acres, his estate in Surrey. With that ideal Miss Amagee did not correspond; there was little in common between that comfortable English figure and a young lady—Grosvenor thought of her as a young person—who traversed the ends of the world in mosquito boots, riding-breeches, and a cotton shirt, carrying a rifle and speaking in a soft, un-English, drawling voice, language which would have provoked Doctor Johnson to furious expostulation.

Two mornings after the spirit of the collector had overwhelmed the prudence of Mr. Amagee, Grosvenor and the Bimbashi were sitting at breakfast when a murmur of excitement from below fell on their ears,

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and suddenly Miss Amagee stood on the threshold.

The sleeves of her muddied shirt were in rags, her riding-breeches smeared with mud, her boots caked with it, her face smudged; only her rifle was spotless. The tan was light on her face, drawn with weariness, and she carried her wide-brimmed hat in her hand, leaving her dishevelled brown hair uncovered.

"Say, are you the Government authority in these parts?" she said in a voice a little hoarse from exhaustion. Then her sombre eyes fell on Colonel Grosvenor and widened ever so slightly, and she added: "Morning, Colonel. Guess I didn't expect to find you up here."

Grosvenor bowed, recovered from his surprise, and greeted her and introduced her to the Bimbashi.

Miss Amagee shook hands with him and said: "I've lost my father, Captain."

"You've lost your father!" said the Bimbashi.

"Sure; Henry S. Amagee," she said. "The night before last some Shilluks started a voodoo show with tom-toms and dancing and howling in the forest near where we were camped, about thirty miles south of here, and dad wanted to snap them, with a flashlight, for a photo-card. And he went off when I was asleep and never came back."

"He snapped the Shilluks at their rites?" cried Briggard. "That was a da—dashed silly thing to do!"

"Sure it was. But pop doesn't pause and consider so as you could notice when he wants a photo-card. He collects them," said Miss Amagee. "When I woke I hunted for him all round the clearing where the voodoo was and a couple of miles along the Shilluks' trail, and all I found was the lid of his magnesium powder tin. Calculate those niggers didn't like his snapping the show and carried him off. Maybe they've got him prisoner somewhere."

"Say, are you the Government authority in these parts?" she said in a voice a little hoarse from exhaustion.

Her voice was quiet, almost toneless; her face showed no emotion. It seemed to Colonel Grosvenor that a nice young woman would have shown more feeling at the loss of a father.

"Yes—yes—of course—it's quite likely," said the Bimbashi, trying to keep the doubt out of his voice.

But he thought it far more likely that the Shilluks had taken Mr. Amagee away to some quiet place to kill him for his sacrilegious intrusion.

"I thought maybe you could do something," said Miss Amagee.

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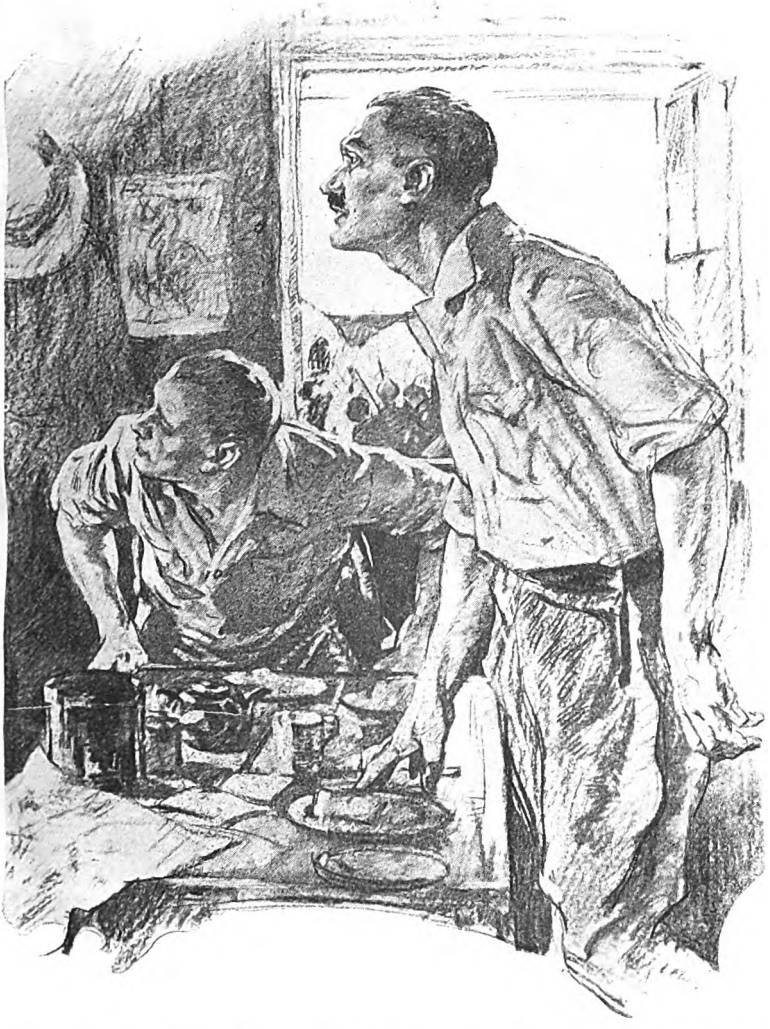
The Bimbashi hesitated; there was little he could do; then he said quickly: "Of course I will. I'll send out my trackers at once. But you mustn't get anxious if they're some days finding him—or—er—perhaps a week or two. The Shilluks



are — er — touchy about their religious rites."

Miss Amagee was too quick to miss the suggestion that her father had been murdered, and there was a sudden bright glint of tears in her eyes.

After the lack of emotion in her voice and face that glint gave Grosvenor a shock, a shock that gave his heart a painful little wrench. The girl had not been unfeeling, but Spartan.

"He isn't dead, Captain. You can't kill pop. People have tried." She paused, then added: "Guess I'll go hire some boys to haul the flivver out of the edge of the swamp I drove into. It ain't more than eight miles away. Those swamps do make motoring at night difficult in these parts."

"You drove here thirty miles since yesterday afternoon—at night?" exclaimed the Bimbashi in almost incredulous accents.

"Most of the night. It was about six when I struck that swamp."

"Then you'll stay here and rest," said the two men with one voice.

There followed protests and expostulations; but so it was arranged. After receiving directions how to reach the glade of the celebration and the spot where the flivver was bogged, of an exactness which astonished him, the Bimbashi went to send out his trackers to hunt for Mr. Amagee, and a party of boys to haul the car out of the swamp. Grosvenor saw to Miss Amagee's comfort in a way the house-boys found violent, and as he drove them he mixed a cocktail and gave her biscuits to eat with it to take the edge off her weariness, found garments for her to wear while her own were being washed or brushed, and ushered her into the bathroom. She came from it to find breakfast ready for her, and she was more than ready for it.

When she had finished her breakfast she said: "I guess I'd like to be getting along to the flivver and those boys and then on to your trackers, Captain. Maybe I could see they humped themselves a bit."

"There's nothing to be done till the

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trackers get news of Mr. Amagee," said the Bimbashi. "So you may as well rest till they do."

"Guess I shouldn't rest," she said, and her lips drooped.

"You'll lie down for four hours at least. At any rate, you won't get your clothes for four hours," said Grosvenor in somewhat incisive accents. "You can't do anything now, and when you can you'll be all the fitter to do it."

There were sparks in Miss Amagee's eyes as she turned sharply to him. "Say, who are you ordering——?" she began, paused, perceived that what he said was sensible, and added: "Maybe you're right, Colonel. I'll need to be fit. But in four hours I go, and if news comes of pop and I'm asleep, you'll wake me?"

"Certainly. You go to sleep," said Grosvenor, kindly.

She withdrew quietly into Briggard's bedroom.

"Any chance of your finding him?" asked Grosvenor.

"Bits of him, perhaps," said the Bimbashi. "I'll get Runishi in and give him a good talking to. He's the most powerful chief about here. I suppose there's no chance of stopping Miss Amagee from going?"

"None," said Grosvenor.

"Well, will you go with her? If Amagee's still alive I can work things better from here. They'll take a bit of working, for the Shilluks, like most niggers, are very touchy about those beanos, and there might be serious trouble," said the Bimbashi. "I'd be glad to know that somebody was looking after her."

"Of course I'll go," said Grosvenor.

"That's good," said the Bimbashi in a tone of relief, and he went out to make the arrangements.

Miss Amagee must have possessed Napoleon's gift of awaking at an appointed minute, for four hours after she went into the Bimbashi's bedroom she came out of it, her astonishingly vital self again.

Her clothes were washed and brushed and dried, and there was a khaki drill shirt in the place of her torn one. She would only borrow it. Then she had lunch. After it, rather in the manner of a polite child, she thanked the Bimbashi and said that she would hire some boys and get to the flivver and back to the clearing in the forest and start hunting for Mr. Amagee herself, and if he would send word to his trackers to report to her her father's whereabouts, she would be more obliged to him still.

Briggard said that he would, but once more he tried to persuade her to wait at Kuala till information came. When he failed, he said that Colonel Grosvenor would go with her.

She looked at Grosvenor with troubled eyes and said: "That's vurry kind of you, Colonel. But I guess I can get along vurry well by myself. I don't like to trouble you."

"It's no trouble at all," said Grosvenor, quickly. "I'm only here for the shooting, and I may get something out of the common in that forest."

She made no further protests; and they went out of the bungalow to find their escort ready to start, an escort in keeping with the importance of Grosvenor and able to cope with nervous natives, except in large quantities. There were thirty porters, picked men, to carry their food and drink, and five-and-twenty Askaris with a sergeant in command.

GROSVENOR had not gone a mile before he perceived clearly that she made no more of the hard going than he did himself, and he was astonished at the ease with which she carried her rifle. It might have been a walking-stick. When his astonishment found voice, she told him that she had carried a light rifle on her wanderings with her father when she was ten, and heavier ones as she grew stronger, often for months at a time.

"Pop always liked to get about a bit," she said.

Three hours' steady going brought them to the bogged flivver. It had been dragged out of the swamp, but it was so clogged with mud that it would take hours to clean, and after all they would move through the forest more quickly without it. Miss Amagee took a leather suit-case from it; they left it to be cleaned, and pushed on till sunset.

So it came about that Colonel Grosvenor found himself sitting with Miss Amagee beside a camp fire under the low stars, with that feeling of being alone together away from their kind that breaks down the barriers so quickly. Before they turned in they were talking with an easy friendliness, and Grosvenor had learnt something of the long tale of the Amagee Odyssey. At their earlier meeting at Potter's Gap he had been inclined to disbelieve Mr. Amagee's stories; that incredulity passed, and with it the disapproval with which he had regarded Miss Amagee's self-sufficing air, her language, and her dress. She was certainly like a boy outwardly, but never for a moment could he forget that she was a girl. And for her part she forgot that she had ever called him "Stiff-faced Stephen."

The next afternoon they reached the camp in which she had listened to the troubling rhythm of the drums; again they searched

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the glade and then started along the trail of the Shilluks.

That night beside the camp fire she began to talk about her father. Looking at Grosvenor with sombre eyes, she said slowly, in rather wistful accents: "I guess you figure pop's done with wandering this time, don't you, Colonel?"

Grosvenor hesitated a second too long before he assured her that he had no doubt that they would find Mr. Amagee safe and sound.

She said, rather in the tone of one reassuring herself, "Though perhaps he don't look it, pop's a mighty hard proposition when it comes to a scrap. And just because he walks out of my sight for a day or two, it won't make me think he's gone right off the map. A lot of people at different times have tried to bump off pop, but he's still on it."

"Then I'm sure the Shilluks won't," said Grosvenor.

She talked for a while in her soft, drawling voice, of some tight places in different lands her father had been in and of the ways in which he had extricated himself. Grosvenor gathered that she had been in some of them with him and done quite her fair share of the extricating.

Then she said: "Maybe he's found some place he thinks he'd like to stay in. He's taken that way at times, pop is—like once when we were sailing round the Musquillo islands and came to a little mountain sticking right up out of the sea, all covered with green climbers and nothing but. It was kind of funny, this little old hump of an island, and pop said he'd go back to it some day and make a real house to live in. Then another time he wanted to stay with some Lamas who had a temple in the hills near Tehri. I'll tell the world they were some queer old men. But pop took a fancy to them and said he wouldn't mind to stay there for keeps. It was a kind of green place, with snow on the ranges way up above, and the air was the clearest you ever saw and kind of sharp."

"Maybe it sounds kind of crazy to you, Colonel," she said, presently; "but pop never could bear to stay in one place for very long, and I guess I've caught it from him, for I always want to know what's round the corner, thinking maybe it's something wonderful, and what the people are like in the next township and what they think about. Must sound kind of crazy to you."

"No," said Grosvenor in rather absent-minded accents, for he had been almost as attentive to the play of light on her small, piquant face and glimmering eyes as to this exposition of the temperament of the wanderer. "I might have been like that myself. But some of us are born with obligations, tied down to one place. As a matter of fact, though, I've managed to spend a good deal of my own life, nearly all of my spare time indeed, in wandering."

They were silent a while considering one another; then she said that they had better turn in so that they could get going early the next day.

Early they set out from the glade of the celebration, their trackers moving along the Shilluks' trail at a rather astonishing pace, and, considering its size, the whole party moved with uncommon quickness and noiselessness. But the Bimbashi had given them the pick of his men. From signs invisible to anyone but themselves the trackers had discovered that Mr. Amagee was being carried in a litter, and when she heard this Miss Amagee frowned anxiously.

"Then he *has* got hurt," she said, sadly. "Nothing ever will teach a man. They're just plumb full of foolishness."

"So are women—of their own kind of foolishness," said Grosvenor, quickly, to divert her mind from Mr. Amagee's plight.

"Yes," said Miss Amagee after a pause. "But it don't so often lead to broken bones."

They marched steadily on through the forest, which, Grosvenor believed, stretched to the banks of the Nile—a waste in which there were a few villages, many miles apart, from which the Shilluks who had celebrated the rites had gone to the glade. Bad going in a semi-darkness, it should have been a monotonous and wearisome march, but to Miss Amagee and Grosvenor it was neither. They found one another good company, for there was a kinship of spirit between them, the spirit of the wanderer, and he found himself talking quite freely to her about his work and ambitions and the life at Green Acres. She said that it was a good life when you were old, and he realized that that had been the thought in the back of his mind.

JUST before they encamped on the second night in the forest the party of trackers the Bimbashi had first sent out came in, having overshot the trail of the Shilluks and cast back. The next day they lost it again, and it was fifteen hours before they found it, more than five miles farther on. They found also that Mr. Amagee was still with the party, still being carried in the litter, and Grosvenor began to entertain a hope that since his captors had kept him alive and been to the trouble of carrying him all that way, they might find him safe in the village in which they dwelt. He told Miss Amagee of it, and was again touched by the glimmer of tears in her eyes.

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She said quietly: "I should be kind of lonely without pop, Colonel."

The next morning they came to a Shilluk village by a stream which ran through an open valley. They soon learnt that Mr. Amagee was not in it; but its chief, Kruika, who wore a tall hat, that once had been silk, and a red handkerchief round his neck, and very little else, was an old acquaintance of the Bimbashi, for he had been several times to Kuala to dispute about taxes.

Having learnt that Mr. Amagee was not in the village, Grosvenor questioned him at length about where he was. At first Kruika was politely evasive, but after a long and serious harangue from Grosvenor on the danger of playing the fool with the Government, he admitted that a white man, crippled by the spear-thrust in the leg, had been taken to the village of a chief of the name of Trahano, about fifteen miles to the north-east, on the bank of the Nile.

They had lost more than three hours extracting the information from Kruika, and for seven or eight miles Miss Amagee walked in silence.

Then, in the tone of one reassuring herself, she said firmly: "It would take more than a gang of Shilluks, however het up they might be, to bump off pop."

They travelled faster than they had travelled before, for she set the pace. But even so they only came in sight of Trahano's village at past nine that night, to find that between them and it was half a mile of flooded jungle. There seemed to be nothing to be done till the morning, and Grosvenor was giving orders to encamp when Miss Amagee intervened.

She said firmly: "If pop's in that village, I aim to get to him to-night."

Grosvenor looked at her with a worried air and perceived from her tone and face that, short of tying her up, there was no way of preventing her from making the foolhardy attempt.

"But how do you propose to get to it? It's on an island for the time being."

"On one of those ambach rafts the niggers use for fishing. There's plenty of ambach about," she said, promptly.

The worried cleft between Grosvenor's eyebrows deepened; there *was* plenty of ambach about.

Miss Amagee studied the river. Its sluggish current ran along the farther side of the village; then she said in business-like accents: "Say, Colonel, why shouldn't you and I and the Askaris and the trackers all go on rafts as soon as the moon sets? There's plenty of boys to make as many rafts as we want by the time it's dark enough to go. The way I look at it is, these Shilluks won't make nearly so much trouble if we take them by surprise in the dark. Most likely we'd stampede the lot before they thought of hurting pop."

Grosvenor was silent, considering the suggestion. He had the professional soldier's dislike of a night attack, but in the circumstances it might be the best way to tackle the Shilluks. It was feasible; there was a fair chance of stampeding them. If they did so it might save complications, a fight with its casualties, the necessity of punishing the villagers for fighting, and the consequent danger of starting a native rising. He put the suggestion to the sergeant of the Askaris and the leader of the trackers, and they expressed their warm approval of it. Therefore he moved his men three hundred yards up the bank to a spot from which he could launch his rafts right into the sluggish current so that they would be carried clear of the flooded jungle to the farther side of the village, and set his men to make them.

The whole force worked hard and quickly, and Grosvenor and Miss Amagee sat on a blanket on the river bank, waiting for the rafts to be finished and the slowly moving moon to rise to its height and sink and set.

At last the moon sank behind the forest and the shadow fell across the river. Darkness would come soon, but Grosvenor did not wait for it. The five rafts, lined up along the bank, were pushed into the stream. Each carried seven men, for he had preferred them small and easy to handle. The sluggish current carried them slowly down towards the village, their passengers lying flat on them. Then Grosvenor's anxiety really began; with Miss Amagee and five Askaris he was on the first raft, and he made her lie so that she was sheltered from bullets by his bulkier body. Her presence robbed him of his natural enjoyment of the enterprise, and the last five minutes of the journey were anxious indeed; all the while he was expecting the trees along the edge of the bank to be lit up by the flashes of rifles. But, trusting perhaps to the fact that their village was for the time being an island, the Shilluks had set no watch and the rafts came slowly to land, unseen.

Grosvenor ordered his men to lie down in the shadow of the trees, and sent the trackers forward to scout. Presently they came crawling in to report that the village was asleep. Leaving five men to guard the rafts, that the way of escape might be secured, Grosvenor advanced noiselessly with the rest, up through the trees to the edge of the village. It was faintly illumined by a dull glow from fire-lit doorways, and silent save for the snoring that came through some of them. Grosvenor gave the word;

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the Askaris fired a volley into the air, and yelling at the top of their voices the whole party rushed for the centre of the village and the chief's hut.

The village awoke and left almost in the same movement. The men were out of the huts and bolting for cover first; the women and children were a very little way behind them. Two men, half-a-dozen women, and a dozen children bolted from the chief's hut; the Askaris collared the two men and let the others bolt. A sudden silence fell. From the doorway there came a sudden blinding flash that lit up huts and figures and trees, just one flash and blacker darkness.

Then the voice of Mr. Amagee said in amiable accents: "Hullo, Sally! I was thinking you'd be coming along about now. All right?"

"A bit blinded by your flash, pop. You all right?" said Miss Amagee quietly, but Grosvenor caught the tremor of relief in her voice.

He switched on his electric torch, turned the ray on to Mr. Amagee, and lit up an odd-looking figure of a uniform dirty grey from head to foot, a clay-like, dusty grey.

"You know Colonel Grosvenor, pop. He vurry kindly brought me along, or maybe I'd have been days and days getting here," said Miss Amagee.

Mr. Amagee limped forward and shook Grosvenor warmly by the hand, and said gratefully: "How do, Colonel? I'm mighty glad to see you. And I'm vurry much obliged to you for helping Sally to get here. And if you're the British authority in these parts, I want to tell you how downright unhygienic these native huts are. All they got to sleep in is ashes—years and years old. They all sleep in them, and I've been sleeping in them too. And I wanna tell you, sir, it's just plumb unhygienic."

"Ashes?" said Grosvenor in a blank astonishment, taken aback to be met, after that toilsome journey through the forest and perilous descent on the village, by a complaint about the sleeping accommodation of the natives. "No. I'm not the British authority in these parts. They belong to Egypt, and the Egyptians run them with the help of the British. How long have you been here?"

"Most of three days. I couldn't come away, owing to a jab in the leg I got in a little argyment I had with a bunch of Shilluks. I guess you're right about them not liking to have their photo took, Sally. I couldn't come away, and I couldn't send any message to you either, for I don't know the language these niggers talk, and the little bit of Arabic they've got wasn't enough to get a message clear in their minds. Besides, I didn't know where to send it exactly, for I don't rightly know where I am."

"I reckon you're about thirty-five miles east of Kuala," said Miss Amagee, quietly; but there was a note in her voice that made Grosvenor aware that she was putting a strong constraint on herself.

Perhaps Mr. Amagee was aware of it also, for he said, hurriedly and indulgently: "Is that so? Well, this ain't a bad kind of joint if it weren't for them ashes. I've been quite comfortable, barring my leg, though I had a close call when I first got here. But I'm mighty glad to see you folks all the same. Come right in and meet my friend, the chief."

He stepped back and waved his hand towards the doorway. The many questions that rose to the lips of Grosvenor died of their own confusion. There was something devastating about Mr. Amagee's simple treatment of the situation and the large and amiable calm of his manner. He followed Miss Amagee into the circular hut.

It was lighted by the bright embers of the fire in the middle of it, ringed round by a deep bed of ashes from the fires of many years. Reclining on it was a large, obese old chief, to whom Mr. Amagee introduced them in the most formal fashion and in English, though he could not have understood a word he said.

Then he said: "Meet my friend the Eye That Sees Everything."

He waved his hand towards the back of the hut, from which, at the level of a man's head, hung a pocket camera.

"How do? Pleased to meet you," said the camera, gruffly.

"The old stunt, pop?" said Miss Amagee.

"You said it. And it sure saved me from the cold, cold ground."

"I guess you wanted some saving," said Miss Amagee, and her eyes were cold and the boding note in her voice was louder.

Mr. Amagee heard it, for he said hastily: "Sit down—sit down—make yourselves comfortable," and quickly, before they could seat themselves, he plunged into the story of his adventures.

HE had stolen up to the edge of the glade, unseen by the frenzied celebrants, and taken a flashlight photograph. Then, as he phrased it, Hell had broken loose. He had had the narrowest escape of being killed on the spot, but had come off with a spear-thrust in his hard calf and a large bump on his head. Then, after a furious debate over his bound body, the Shilluks had returned to their rites. "They were quite a while getting het up again," he observed. When the celebration was over they had unbound him, and, finding him crippled, had made a

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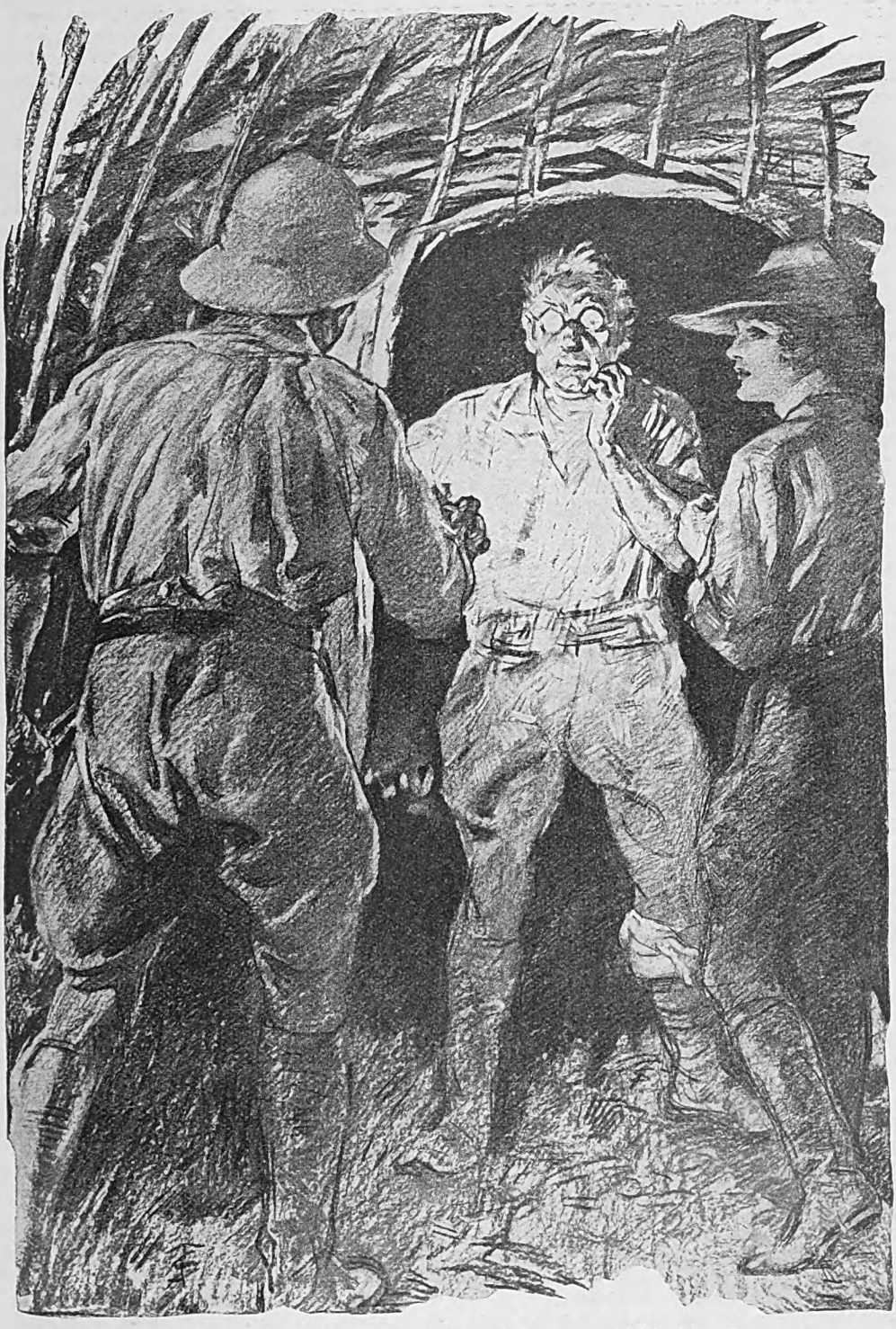

Grosvenor switched on his electric torch and lit up an odd-looking figure of a uniform dirty grey from head to foot.

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rough litter, put him on it, and set out for home. He had rubbed some crystals of permanganate of potash he carried loose in his pocket, in case of snake-bite, into his wound and bound it up.

Knowing the forest and with no trail to find, his captors must have travelled more than twice as fast as his rescuers, for they had reached Trahona's village before sunset on the second day. He had been taken at once to Trahona's hut, and there had been another debate about him. From the manner and vehemence of the speakers he had gathered that it boded him no good. When it came to an end he had been put into a small hut, under guard, and eaten and drunk and gone to sleep. It must have been about midnight that he was taken out of it, for the moon was at the top of the sky, to find a large fire burning in the middle of the village, with about sixty men grouped about it and a throng of women and children in the background. Trahona, with the camera in his hand, was standing on the right of it, and with him two witch-doctors.

Then, to the beating of tom-toms, the men danced round the fire, chanting, and the witch-doctors, leading the chanting, danced too. He wondered what the ceremony was about, uneasily, for he had a strong feeling that he had more to do with it than was good for him, since, when they came near him, the dancers glared at him in sinister fashion.

Of a sudden the drumming and the dancing and the chanting stopped; but in the dead silence the two witch-doctors danced on, and they danced round him, making a great play with two long knives. He guessed that the ceremony was propitiatory, and that he was the transgressor and the victim. He could see no chance; then into his brain, stimulated by fear, an idea flashed. He knew that the Shilluks knew some Arabic from trading with the Arabs, and he knew Arabic himself.

"These old witch-doctors were just doing a last shimmy and ready to park their knives in me," he went on, "and the old chief here was holding my camera just a few yards to the side, and no one was saying a word or moving a finger, and it was all so silent that you could have heard a pin drop, when suddenly my camera says in Arabic as loud as I could make it: 'Stop, fools! You're mad!'

"They did stop, those witch-doctors, and looked round to see where the voice come from.

"'If you kill this guy there'll be no more rain and no more fish. I'm the Eye That Sees Everything,' says the camera.

"The witch-doctors was the first to spot where the voice came from, and they left quickly. Most of the congregation followed their example, without pausing to learn why they were in such a darned hurry, and the rest followed them, and the chief, who was too fat to run and didn't know where the voice come from because he was holding the camera, stood there dithering.

"So I takes the camera out of his hand and sets it on the ground ten feet away, and it says a few kind words to him so that he understood how things were and what an important person I was. Then I talked to him in a friendly way and set him at his ease, and we went into his hut.

"Then I tied the camera up where you see it; and when anyone comes in, it says: 'How do?' And, believe me, not many comes in. They were scared straight off and they're scared still—all except the chief here, and he's fairly set on it. It keeps telling him he's one great and good man, and he thinks it an asset."

HE ended on a note of gentle self-esteem; but he seemed to prefer not to meet Miss Amagee's eyes.

Her eyes were resting on him sombrely, coldly, and she said in accents of icy disapproval: "You sure are a deadly trial when this collectin' foolishness takes a holt on you, pop. You've upset the Government here nearly as bad as a native rising and taken Colonel Grosvenor away from his shooting to traipse through that swampy old forest where there wasn't a thing to shoot even if he dared let off his gun; you've gone and got yourself crippled when it's most important we should be getting after Ginger Gupp, and you've had me guessing painful for more'n five days. I don't see you've any call to be chirpy."

"Chirpy" was the last epithet to apply to Mr. Amagee; under those cold eyes and those icy accents he had wilted and wilted; the last scrap of self-esteem looked to have oozed out of him.

He said feebly, in a tone of almost abject apology: "I'm sorry I've put you out, Colonel, and vurry much obliged to you for looking after Sarah and bringing her here. But you sure had no call to fret about me, Sally. You must ha' known I'd come through somehow. Besides——" Perking up a little, he drew from his wallet a spool of films and gazed at it with loving eyes—"I got what will make a photo-card the like of which never was, though I'll never be able to mail it."

"A photo-card," said Miss Amagee in a tone of immeasurable disapproval.

There came a faint twinkle into Mr. Amagee's pale blue eyes; he perked up a little more, then added: "Also, I've sold the little ol' 'Eye' for forty of the finest tusks you ever set eyes on!"

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The STRAND MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1928.

The Christmas "Strand"

WILL CONTAIN

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and a long instalment of "THE ALTAR OF HONOUR," by

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ARTICLES:

SYBIL THORNDIKE and "ST. JOAN"
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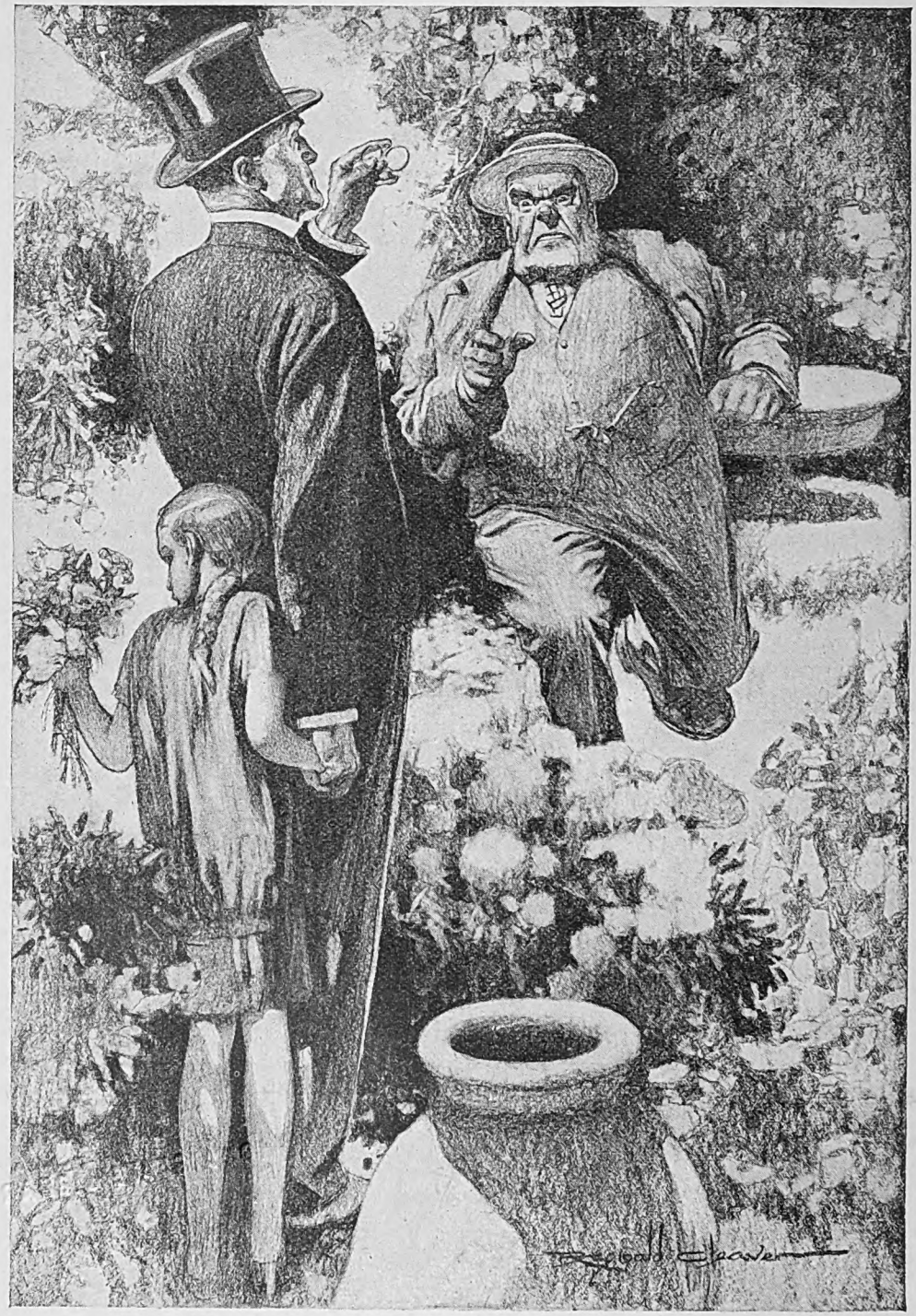

ANGUS McALLISTER CAME OUT OF THE POTTING-SHED AT FORTY-FIVE MILES PER HOUR UNDER HIS OWN STEAM.

(See page 428.)

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Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend

By

P. G. WODEHOUSE

Illustrated by
REGINALD CLEAVER

THE day was so warm, so fair, so magically a thing of sunshine and blue skies and bird song that anyone acquainted with Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, and aware of his liking for fine weather would have pictured him going about the place on this summer morning with a beaming smile and an uplifted heart. Instead of which, humped over the breakfast table, he was directing at a blameless kippered herring a look of such intense bitterness that the fish seemed to sizzle beneath it. For it was August Bank Holiday, and Blandings Castle on August Bank Holiday became, in his lordship's opinion, a miniature Inferno.

This was the day when his park and grounds broke out into a noisome rash of swings, roundabouts, marquees, toy balloons, and paper bags; when a tidal wave of the peasantry and its squealing young engulfed those haunts of immemorial peace. On August Bank Holiday he was not allowed to potter pleasantly about his gardens in an old coat; forces beyond his control shoved him into a stiff collar and a top-hat and told him to go out and be genial. And in the cool of the quiet evenfall they put him on a platform and made him make a speech. To a man with a day like that in front of him fine weather was a mockery.

His sister, Lady Constance Keeble, looked brightly at him over the coffee-pot.

"What a lovely morning!" she said.

Lord Emsworth's gloom deepened. He chafed at being called upon—by this woman of all others—to behave as if everything was for the jolliest in the jolliest of all possible worlds. But for his sister Constance and her hawk-like vigilance, he might, he thought, have been able at least to dodge the top-hat.

"Have you got your speech ready?"

"Yes."

"Well, mind you learn it by heart this time and don't stammer and dodder as you did last year."

Lord Emsworth pushed plate and kipper away. He had lost his desire for food.

"And don't forget you have to go to the village this morning to judge the cottage gardens."

"All right, all right, all right," said his lordship, testily. "I've not forgotten."

"I think I will come to the village with you. There are a number of those Fresh Air London children staying there now, and I must warn them to behave properly when they come to the *fête* this afternoon. You know what London children are. McAllister says he found one of them in the gardens the other day, picking his flowers."

At any other time the news of this outrage would, no doubt, have affected Lord Emsworth profoundly. But now, so intense was his self-pity, he did not even shudder. He drank coffee with the air of a man who regretted that it was not hemlock.

"By the way, McAllister was speaking to me again last night about that gravel path through the yew alley. He seems very keen on it."

"Glug!" said Lord Emsworth—which, as any philologist will tell you, is the sound which Earls always make when stricken to the soul while drinking coffee.

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CONCERNING Glasgow, that great commercial and manufacturing city in the county of Lanarkshire in Scotland, much has been written. So lyrically does the *Encyclopædia Britannica* deal with the place that it covers twenty-seven pages before it can tear itself away and go on to Glass, Glastonbury, Glatz, and Glauber. The only aspect of it, however, which immediately concerns the present historian is the fact that the citizens it breeds are apt to be grim, dour, persevering, tenacious men; men with red whiskers who know what they want and mean to get it. Such a one was Angus McAllister, head-gardener at Blandings Castle.

For years Angus McAllister had set before himself as his earthly goal the construction of a gravel path through the Castle's famous yew alley. For years he had been bringing the project to the notice of his employer, though in anyone less whiskered the latter's unconcealed loathing would have caused embarrassment. And now, it seemed, he was at it again.

"Gravel path!" Lord Emsworth stiffened through the whole length of his stringy body. Nature, he had always maintained, intended a yew alley to be carpeted with a mossy growth. And, whatever Nature felt about it, he personally was dashed if he was going to have men with Clydeside accents and faces like dissipated potatoes coming along and mutilating that lovely expanse of green velvet. "Gravel path, indeed! Why not asphalt? Why not a few hoardings with advertisements of liver pills and a filling station? That's what the man would really like."

Lord Emsworth felt bitter, and when he felt bitter he could be terribly sarcastic.

"Well, I think it is a very good idea," said his sister. "One could walk there in wet weather then. Damp moss is ruinous to shoes."

Lord Emsworth rose. He could bear no more of this. He left the table, the room, and the house, and, reaching the yew alley some minutes later, was revolted to find it infested by Angus McAllister in person. The head-gardener was standing gazing at the moss like a high priest of some ancient religion about to stick the gaff into the human sacrifice.

"Morning, McAllister," said Lord Emsworth, coldly.

"Good morrrrning, your lorrudsheep."

There was a pause. Angus McAllister, extending a foot that looked like a violin-case, pressed it on the moss. The meaning of the gesture was plain. It expressed contempt, dislike, a generally anti-moss spirit; and Lord Emsworth, wincing, surveyed the man unpleasantly through his pince-nez. Though not often given to theological speculation, he was wondering why Providence, if obliged to make head-gardeners, had found it necessary to make them so Scotch. In the case of Angus McAllister, why, going a step farther, have made him a human being at all? All the ingredients of a first-class mule simply thrown away. He felt that he might have liked Angus McAllister if he had been a mule.

"I was speaking to her leddyship yesterday."

"Oh?"

"About the gravel path I was speaking to her leddyship."

"Oh?"

"Her leddyship likes the notion fine."

"Indeed! Well——"

Lord Emsworth's face had turned a lively pink, and he was about to release the blistering words which were forming themselves in his mind when suddenly he caught the head-gardener's eye and paused. Angus McAllister was looking at him in a peculiar manner, and he knew what that look meant. Just one crack, his eye was saying—in Scotch, of course—just one crack out of you and I tender my resignation. And with a sickening shock it came home to Lord Emsworth how completely he was in this man's clutches.

He shuffled miserably. Yes, he was helpless. Except for that kink about gravel paths, Angus McAllister was a head-gardener in a thousand, and he needed him. He could not do without him. Filled with the coward rage that dares to burn but does not dare to blaze, Lord Emsworth coughed a cough that was undisguisedly a bronchial white flag.

"I'll—er—I'll think it over, McAllister."

"Mphm."

"I have to go to the village now. I will see you later."

"Mphm."

"Meanwhile, I will—er—think it over."

"Mphm."

THE task of judging the floral displays in the cottage gardens of the little village of Blandings Parva was one to which Lord Emsworth had looked forward with pleasurable anticipation. It was the sort of job he liked. But now, even though he had managed to give his sister Constance the slip and was free from her threatened society, he approached the task with a downcast spirit. It is always unpleasant for a proud man to realize that he is no longer captain of his soul; that he is to all intents and purposes ground beneath the number twelve heel of a Glaswegian head-gardener; and, brooding on this, he judged the cottage

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gardens with a distrait eye. It was only when he came to the last on his list that anything like animation crept into his demeanour.

This, he perceived, peering over its rickety fence, was not at all a bad little garden. It demanded closer inspection. He unlatched the gate and pottered in. And a dog, dozing behind a water-butt, opened one eye and looked at him. It was one of those hairy, nondescript dogs, and its gaze was cold, wary, and suspicious, like that of a stockbroker who thinks someone is going to play the confidence trick on him.

Lord Emsworth did not observe the animal. He had pottered to a bed of wallflowers and now, stooping, he took a sniff at them.

As sniffs go, it was an innocent sniff, but the dog for some reason appeared to read into it criminality of a high order. All the indignant householder in him woke in a flash. The next moment the world had become full of hideous noises, and Lord Emsworth's preoccupation was swept away in a passionate desire to save his ankles from harm.

He was not at his best with strange dogs. Beyond saying "Go away, sir!" and leaping to and fro with an agility surprising in one of his years, he had accomplished little in the direction of a reasoned plan of defence when the cottage door opened and a girl came out.

"Hoy!" cried the girl.

And on the instant, at the mere sound of her voice, the mongrel, suspending hostilities, bounded at the new-comer and writhed on his back at her feet with all four legs in the air. The spectacle reminded Lord Emsworth irresistibly of his own behaviour when in the presence of Angus McAllister.

He blinked at his preserver. She was a small girl, of uncertain age—possibly twelve or thirteen, though a combination of London fogs and early cares had given her face a

The head-gardener was standing gazing at the moss like a high priest of some ancient religion about to stick the gaff into the human sacrifice.

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sort of wizened motherliness which in some odd way caused his lordship from the first to look on her as belonging to his own generation. She was the type of girl you see in back streets carrying a baby nearly as large as herself and still retaining sufficient energy to lead one little brother by the hand and shout recrimination at another in the distance. Her cheeks shone from recent soaping, and she was dressed in a velveteen frock which was obviously the pick of her wardrobe. Her hair, in defiance of the prevailing mode, she wore drawn tightly back into a short pigtail.

" Er—thank you," said Lord Emsworth.

" Thank you, sir," said the girl.

For what she was thanking him, his lordship was not able to gather. Later, as their acquaintance ripened, he was to discover that this strange gratitude was a habit with his new friend. She thanked everybody for everything. At the moment, the mannerism surprised him. He continued to blink at her through his pince-nez.

Lack of practice had rendered Lord Emsworth a little rusty in the art of making conversation to members of the other sex. He sought in his mind for topics.

" Fine day."

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

" Are you——" Lord Emsworth furtively consulted his list. " Are you the daughter of—ah—Ebenezer Sprockett ? " he asked, thinking, as he had often thought before, what ghastly names some of his tenantry possessed.

" No, sir. I'm from London, sir."

" Ah ! London, eh ? Doosid warm it must be there." He paused. Then, remembering a formula of his youth, " Er—been out much this season ? "

" No, sir. Thank you, sir."

" Everybody out of town now, I suppose ? What part of London ? "

" Drury Line, sir."

" What's your name, eh, what ? "

" Gladys, sir. Thank you, sir. This is Ern."

A small boy had wandered out of the cottage, a rather hard-boiled specimen with freckles, bearing surprisingly in his hand a large and beautiful bunch of flowers. Lord Emsworth bowed courteously, and with the addition of this third party to the *tête-à-tête* felt more at his ease.

" How do you do ? " he said. " What pretty flowers ! "

With her brother's advent, Gladys also had lost diffidence and gained conversational *aplomb*.

" A treat, ain't they ? " she agreed eagerly. " I got 'em for 'im up at the big 'ahse. Coo ! The old josser the plice belongs to didn't 'arf chase me. 'E found me picking 'em and 'e sharted somefin' at me and come runnin' after me, but I copped 'im on the shin wiv a stone and 'e stopped to rub it and I come away."

LORD EMSWORTH might have corrected her impression that Blandings Castle and its gardens belonged to Angus McAllister, but his mind was so filled with admiration and gratitude that he refrained from doing so. He looked at the girl almost reverently. Not content with controlling savage dogs with a mere word, this superwoman actually threw stones at Angus McAllister—a thing which he had never been able to nerve himself to do in an association which had lasted nine years—and, what was more, copped him on the shin with them. What nonsense, Lord Emsworth felt, the papers talked about the modern girl. If this was a specimen, the modern girl was the highest point the sex had yet reached.

" Ern," said Gladys, changing the subject, " is wearin' 'air-oil to-diy."

Lord Emsworth had already observed this and had, indeed, been moving to windward as she spoke.

" For the feet," explained Gladys.

" For the feet ? " It seemed unusual.

" For the feet in the pork this afternoon."

" Oh, you are going to the *fête ?* "

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

For the first time Lord Emsworth found himself regarding that grisly social event with something approaching favour.

" We must look out for one another there," he said, cordially. " You will remember me again ? I shall be wearing——" he gulped—" a top-hat."

" Ern's going to wear a stror penamar that's been give 'im."

Lord Emsworth regarded the lucky young devil with frank envy. He rather fancied he knew that panama. It had been his constant companion for some six years, and then had been torn from him by his sister Constance and handed over to the vicar's wife for her rummage-sale.

He sighed.

" Well, good-bye."

" Good-bye, sir. Thank you, sir."

Lord Emsworth walked pensively out of the garden and, turning into the little street, encountered Lady Constance.

" Oh, there you are, Clarence."

" Yes," said Lord Emsworth, for such was the case.

" Have you finished judging the gardens ?"

" Yes."

" I am just going into this end cottage here. The vicar tells me there is a little girl from London staying there. I want to

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warn her to behave this afternoon. I have spoken to the others."

Lord Emsworth drew himself up. His pince-nez were slightly askew, but despite this his gaze was commanding and impressive.

"Well, mind what you say," he said, authoritatively. "None of your district visiting stuff, Constance."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. I have the greatest respect for the young lady to whom you refer. She behaved on a certain recent occasion—on two recent occasions—with notable gallantry and resource, and I won't have her ballyragged, understand that!"

"What's your name, eh, what?"
"Gladys, sir. Thank you, sir. This is Ern."

THE technical title of the orgy which broke out annually on the first Monday in August in the park of Blandings Castle was the Blandings Parva School Treat, and it seemed to Lord Emsworth, wanly watching the proceedings from under the shadow of his top-hat, that if this was the sort of thing schools looked on as pleasure he and they were mentally poles apart. A function like the Blandings Parva School Treat blurred his conception of Man as Nature's final word.

The decent sheep and cattle to whom this park normally belonged had been hustled away into regions unknown, leaving the smooth expanse of turf to children whose vivacity scared Lord Emsworth and adults who appeared to him to have cast aside all dignity and every other noble quality which goes to make a one hundred per cent. British citizen. Look at Mrs. Rossiter over there, for instance, the wife of Jno. Rossiter, Provisions, Groceries, and Home-Made Jams. On any other day of the year, when you met Mrs. Rossiter, she was a nice, quiet, docile woman who gave at the knees respectfully as you passed. To-day, flushed in the face and with her bonnet on one side, she seemed to have gone completely native. She was wandering to and fro drinking lemonade out of a bottle and employing her mouth, when not so occupied, to make a devastating noise with what he believed was termed a squeaker.

The injustice of the thing stung Lord Emsworth. This park was his own private

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park. What right had people to come and blow squeakers in it? How would Mrs. Rossiter like it if one afternoon he suddenly invaded her neat little garden in the High Street and rushed about over her lawn blowing a squeaker?

And it was always on these occasions so infernally hot. July might have ended in a flurry of snow, but directly the first Monday in August arrived and he had to put on a stiff collar out came the sun, blazing with tropic fury.

Of course, admitted Lord Emsworth, for he was a fair-minded man, this cut both ways. The hotter the day, the more quickly his collar lost its starch and ceased to spike him like a javelin. This afternoon, for instance, it had resolved itself almost immediately into something which felt like a wet compress. Severe as were his sufferings, he was compelled to recognize that he was that much ahead of the game.

A masterful figure loomed at his side.

"Clarence!"

Lord Emsworth's mental and spiritual state was now such that not even the advent of his sister Constance could add noticeably to his discomfort.

"Clarence, you look a perfect sight."

"I know I do. Who wouldn't in a rig-out like this? Why in the name of goodness you always insist——"

"Please don't be childish, Clarence. I cannot understand the fuss you make about dressing for once in your life like a reasonable English gentleman and not like a tramp."

"It's this top-hat. It's exciting the children."

"What on earth do you mean, exciting the children?"

"Well, all I can tell you is that just now, as I was passing the place where they're playing football—football! In weather like this!—a small boy called out something derogatory and threw a portion of a coco-nut at it."

"If you will identify the child," said Lady Constance, warmly, "I will have him severely punished."

"How the dickens," replied his lordship with equal warmth, "can I identify the child? They all look alike to me. And if I did identify him, I would shake him by the hand. A boy who throws coco-nuts at top-hats is fundamentally sound in his views. And stiff collars——"

"Stiff! That's what I came to speak to you about. Are you aware that your collar looks like a rag? Go in and change it at once."

"But, my dear Constance——"

"At once, Clarence. I simply cannot understand a man having so little pride in his appearance. But all your life you have been like that. I remember when we were children——"

Lord Emsworth's past was not of such a purity that he was prepared to stand and listen to it being lectured on by a sister with a good memory.

"Oh, all right, all right, all right," he said. "I'll change it, I'll change it."

"Well, hurry. They are just starting tea."

Lord Emsworth quivered.

"Have I got to go into that tea-tent?"

"Of course you have. Don't be so ridiculous. I do wish you would realize your position. As master of Blandings Castle——"

A bitter, mirthless laugh from the poor peon thus ludicrously described drowned the rest of the sentence.

IT always seemed to Lord Emsworth, in analysing these entertainments, that the August Bank Holiday saturnalia at Blandings Castle reached a peak of repulsiveness when tea was served in the big marquee. Tea over, the agony abated, to become acute once more at the moment when he stepped to the edge of the platform and cleared his throat and tried to recollect what the deuce he had planned to say to the goggling audience beneath him. After that it subsided again and passed until the following August.

Conditions during the tea hour, the marquee having stood all day under a blazing sun, were generally such that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, had they been there, could have learned something new about burning fiery furnaces. Lord Emsworth, delayed by the revision of his toilet, made his entry when the meal was half over and was pleased to find that his second collar almost instantaneously began to relax its iron grip. That, however, was the only gleam of happiness which was to be vouchsafed him. Once in the tent, it took him but a moment to discern with his experienced eye that the present feast was eclipsing in frightfulness all its predecessors.

Young Blandings Parva, in its normal form, tended rather to the stolidly bovine than the riotous. In all villages, of course, there must of necessity be an occasional tough egg—in the case of Blandings Parva the names of Willie Drake and Thomas (Rat-Face) Blenkiron spring to the mind—but it was seldom that the local infants offered anything beyond the power of a curate to control. What was giving the present gathering its striking resemblance to a lively reunion of *sans-culottes* at the height of the French Revolution was the admixture of the Fresh Air London visitors.

About the London child, reared among the

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tin cans and cabbage stalks of Drury Lane and Clare Market, there is a breezy insouciance which his country cousin lacks. Years of back-chat with annoyed parents and relatives have cured him of any tendency he may have had towards shyness, with the result that when he requires anything he grabs for it, and when he is amused by any slight peculiarity in the personal appearance of members of the governing classes he finds no difficulty in translating his thoughts into speech. Already, up and down the long tables, the curate's unfortunate squint was coming in for hearty comment, and the front teeth of one of the school-teachers ran it a close second for popularity. Lord Emsworth was not, as a rule, a man of swift inspirations, but it occurred to him at this juncture that it would be a prudent move to take off his top-hat before his little guests observed it and appreciated its humorous possibilities.

Lord Emsworth had had sufficient. Even Constance, unreasonable woman though she was, could hardly expect him to stay and beam genially under conditions like this. All civilized laws had obviously gone by the board and anarchy reigned in the marquee. The curate was doing his best to form a provisional government consisting of himself and the two school-teachers, but there was only one man who could have coped adequately with the situation, and that was King Herod, who—regrettably—was not among those present. Feeling like some aristocrat of the old *régime* sneaking away from the tumbril, Lord Emsworth edged to the exit and withdrew.

OUTSIDE the marquee the world was quieter, but only comparatively so. What Lord Emsworth craved was solitude, and in all the broad park there seemed to be but one spot where it was to be had. This was a red-tiled shed, standing beside a small pond, used at happier times as a lounge or retiring-room for cattle. Hurrying thither, his lordship had just begun to revel in the cool, cow-scented dimness of its interior when from one of the dark corners, causing him to start and bite his tongue, there came the sound of a subdued sniff.

He turned. This, he felt, was persecution. With the whole park to mess about in, why should an infernal child invade this one sanctuary of his? He spoke with angry sharpness. He came of a line of warrior ancestors and his fighting blood was up.

"Who's that?"

"Me, sir. Thank you, sir."

Only one person of Lord Emsworth's acquaintance was capable of expressing gratitude for having been barked at in such a tone. His wrath died away and remorse took its place. He felt like a man who in error has kicked a favourite dog.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What in the world are you doing in a cow-shed?"

"I was put."

"Put? How do you mean, put? Why?"

"For pinching things, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Eh? What? Pinching things? Most extraordinary. What did you—er—pinch?"

"Two buns, two jem-sengwiches, two apples, and a slicer cake."

The girl had come out of her corner and was standing correctly at attention. Force of habit had caused her to intone the list of the purloined articles in the sing-song voice in which she was wont to recite the multiplication-table at school, but Lord Emsworth could see that she was deeply moved. Tear-stains glistened on her face, and no Emsworth had ever been able to watch unstirred a woman's tears. The ninth Earl was visibly affected.

"Blow your nose," he said, hospitably extending his handkerchief.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"What did you say you had pinched? Two buns——"

"——Two jem-sengwiches, two apples, and a slicer cake."

"Did you eat them?"

"No, sir. They wasn't for me. They was for Ern."

"Ern? Oh, ah, yes. Yes, to be sure. For Ern, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"But why the dooce couldn't Ern have—er—pinched them for himself? Strong, able-bodied young feller, I mean."

Lord Emsworth, a member of the old school, did not like this disposition on the part of the modern young man to shirk the dirty work and let the woman pay.

"Ern wasn't allowed to come to the treat, sir. Thank you, sir."

"What! Not allowed? Who said he mustn't?"

"The lidy, sir."

"What lidy?"

"The one that come in just after you'd gorn this morning."

A fierce snort escaped Lord Emsworth. Constance! What the devil did Constance mean by taking it upon herself to revise his list of guests without so much as a——Constance, eh? He snorted again. One of these days Constance would go too far.

"Monstrous!" he cried.

"Yes, sir."

"High-handed tyranny, by Gad. Did she give any reason?"

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" The lidy didn't like Ern biting 'er in the leg, sir."

" Ern bit her in the leg ? "

" Yes, sir. Pliying 'e was a dorg. And the lidy was cross and Ern wasn't allowed to come to the treat, and I told 'im I'd bring 'im back somefing nice."

Lord Emsworth breathed heavily. He had not supposed that in these degenerate days a family like this existed. The sister copped Angus McAllister on the shin with stones, the brother bit Constance in the leg. It was like listening to some grand old saga of the exploits of heroes and demi-gods.

" I thought if I didn't 'ave nothing myself it would make it all right."

" Nothing ? " Lord Emsworth started. " Do you mean to tell me you have not had tea ? "

" No, sir. Thank you, sir. I thought if I didn't 'ave none, then it would be all right Ern 'aving what I would 'ave 'ad if I 'ad 'ave 'ad."

His lordship's head, never strong, swam a little. Then it resumed its equilibrium. He caught her drift.

" God bless my soul ! " said Lord Emsworth. " I never heard anything so monstrous and appalling in my life. Come with me."

" The lidy said I was to stop 'ere, sir."

Lord Emsworth gave vent to his loudest snort of the afternoon.

" Confound the lidy ! "

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

FIVE minutes later, Beach, the butler, enjoying a siesta in the housekeeper's room, was roused from his slumbers by the unexpected ringing of a bell. Answering its summons, he found his employer in the library, and with him a surprising young person in a velveteen frock, at the sight of whom his eyebrows quivered and, but for his iron self-restraint, would have risen.

" Beach ! "

" Your lordship ? "

" This young lady would like some tea."

" Very good, your lordship."

" Buns, you know. And apples, and jam-sandwiches, and cake and that sort of thing."

" Very good, your lordship."

" And she has a brother, Beach."

" Indeed, your lordship ? "

" She will want to take some stuff away for him." Lord Emsworth turned to his guest. " Ernest would like a little chicken, perhaps ? "

" Coo ! "

" I beg your pardon ? "

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

" And a slice or two of ham ? "

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

" And—Ernest has no gouty tendency ? "

" No, sir. Thank you, sir."

" Capital ! Then a bottle of that new lot of port, Beach. It's some stuff they've sent me down to try," explained his lordship. " Nothing special, you understand," he added, apologetically, " but quite drinkable. I should like your brother's opinion of it. See that all that is put together in a parcel, Beach, and leave it on the table in the hall. We will pick it up as we go out."

A welcome coolness had crept into the evening air by the time Lord Emsworth and his guest came out of the great door of the castle. Gladys, holding her host's hand and clutching the parcel, sighed contentedly. She had done herself well at the tea-table. Life seemed to have nothing more to offer.

Lord Emsworth did not share this view. His spacious mood had not yet exhausted itself.

" Now, is there anything else you can think of that Ernest would like ? " he asked. " If so, do not hesitate to mention it. Beach, can you think of anything ? "

The butler, hovering respectfully, was unable to do so.

" No, your lordship. I ventured to add—on my own responsibility, your lordship—some hard-boiled eggs and a pot of jam to the parcel."

" Excellent ! You are sure there is nothing else ? "

A wistful look came into Gladys's eyes.

" Could he 'ave some flarce ? "

" Certainly," said Lord Emsworth. " Certainly, certainly, certainly. By all means. Just what I was about to suggest my—— Er—what *is* flarce ? "

Beach, the linguist, interpreted.

" I think the young lady means flowers, your lordship."

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Flarce."

" Oh ! " said Lord Emsworth. " Oh ! Flarce ? " he said, slowly. " Oh, ah, yes. Yes, I see. H'm ! "

He removed his pince-nez, wiped them thoughtfully, replaced them, and gazed with wrinkling forehead at the gardens that stretched gaily out before him. Flarce ! It would be idle to deny that those gardens contained flarce in full measure. They were bright with Achillea, Bignonia Radicans, Campanula, Digitalis, Euphorbia, Funkia, Gypsophila, Helianthus, Iris, Liatris, Monarda, Phlox Drummondi, Salvia, Thalictrum, Vinca, and Yucca. But the devil of it was that Angus McAllister would have a fit if they were picked. Across the threshold of this Eden the ginger whiskers of Angus McAllister lay like the flaming sword.

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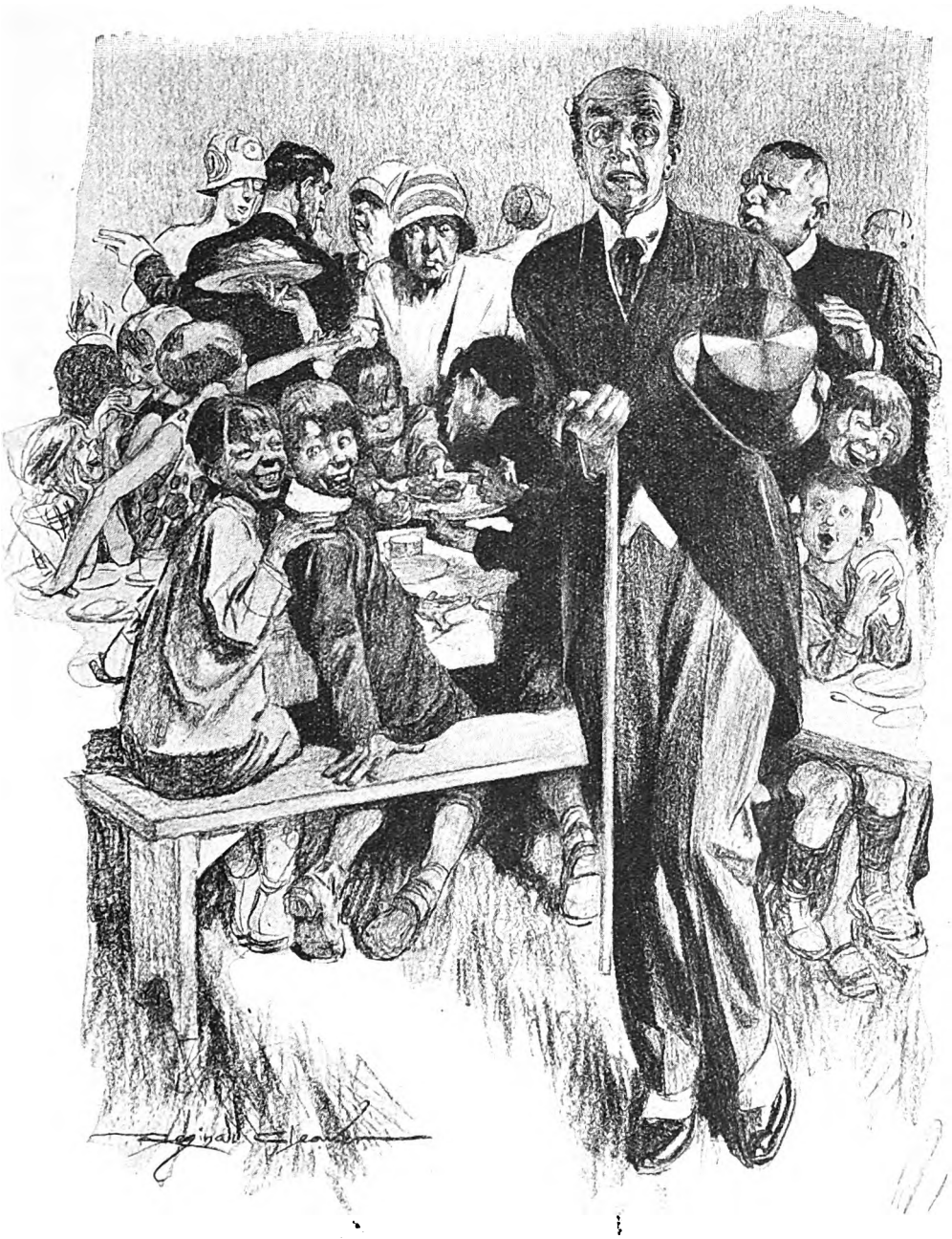

Feeling like some aristocrat of the old *regime* sneaking away from the tumbril, Lord Emsworth edged to the exit and withdrew.

As a general rule, the procedure for getting flowers out of Angus McAllister was as follows. You waited till he was in one of his rare moods of complaisance, then you led the conversation gently round to the subject of interior decoration, and then, choosing your moment, you asked if he could possibly spare a few to be put in vases. The last thing you thought of doing was to charge in and start helping yourself.

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"I—er——" said Lord Emsworth.

He stopped. In a sudden blinding flash of clear vision he had seen himself for what he was—the spineless, unspeakably unworthy descendant of ancestors who, though they may have had their faults, had certainly known how to handle *employés*. It was: "How now, varlet!" and "Marry come up, thou malapert knave!" in the days of previous Earls of Emsworth. Of course, they had possessed certain advantages which he lacked. It undoubtedly helped a man in his dealings with the domestic staff to have, as they had had, the rights of the high, the middle, and the low justice—which meant, broadly, that if you got annoyed with your head-gardener you could immediately divide him into four head-gardeners with a battle-axe and no questions asked; but even so, he realized that they were better men than he was and that, if he allowed craven fear of Angus McAllister to stand in the way of this delightful girl and her charming brother getting all the flowers they required, he was not worthy to be the last of their line.

Lord Emsworth wrestled with his tremors.

"Certainly, certainly, certainly," he said, though not without a qualm; "take as many as you want."

And so it came about that Angus McAllister, crouched in his potting-shed like some dangerous beast in its den, beheld a sight which first froze his blood and then sent it boiling through his veins. Flitting to and fro through his sacred gardens, picking his sacred flowers, was a small girl in a velveteen frock. And—which brought apoplexy a step closer—it was the same small girl who two days before had copped him on the shin with a stone. The stillness of the summer evening was shattered by a roar that sounded like boilers exploding, and Angus McAllister came out of the potting-shed at forty-five miles per hour under his own steam.

Gladys did not linger. She was a London child, trained from infancy to bear herself gallantly in the presence of alarms and excursions, but this excursion had been so sudden that it momentarily broke her nerve. With a horrified yelp, she scuttled to where Lord Emsworth stood and, hiding behind him, clutched the tails of his morning-coat.

"Oo-er!" said Gladys.

Lord Emsworth was not feeling so frightfully good himself. We have pictured him a few moments back drawing inspiration from the nobility of his ancestors and saying, in effect, "That for McAllister!" but truth now compels us to admit that this hardy attitude was largely due to the fact that he believed the head-gardener to be a safe quarter of a mile away among the swings and roundabouts of the *fête*. The spectacle of the man charging vengefully down on him with gleaming eyes and bristling whiskers made him feel like a nervous English infantryman at the Battle of Bannockburn. His knees shook and the soul within him quivered.

And then something happened, and the whole aspect of the situation changed.

It was, in itself, quite a trivial thing, but it had an astoundingly stimulating effect on Lord Emsworth's morale. What happened was that Gladys, seeking further protection, slipped at this moment a small, hot hand into his.

It was a mute vote of confidence, and Lord Emsworth intended to be worthy of it.

"He's coming," whispered his lordship's inferiority complex, agitatedly.

"What of it?" replied Lord Emsworth, stoutly.

"Tick him off," breathed his lordship's ancestors in his other ear.

"Leave it to me," replied Lord Emsworth.

He drew himself up and adjusted his pince-nez. He felt filled with a cool masterfulness. If the man tendered his resignation, let him tender his damned resignation. There were other head-gardeners in the world.

"Well, McAllister?" said Lord Emsworth, coldly.

He removed his top-hat and brushed it against his sleeve.

"What is the matter, McAllister?"

He replaced his top-hat.

"You appear agitated, McAllister."

He jerked his head militantly. The hat fell off. He let it lie. Freed from its loathsome weight, he felt more masterful than ever. It had just needed that to bring him to the top of his form.

"This young lady," said Lord Emsworth, "has my full permission to pick all the flowers she wants, McAllister. If you do not see eye to eye with me in this matter, McAllister, say so and we will discuss what you are going to do about it, McAllister. These gardens, McAllister, belong to me, and if you do not—er—appreciate that fact you will, no doubt, be able to find another employer—ah—more in tune with your views. I value your services highly, McAllister, but I will not be dictated to in my own garden, McAllister. Er—dash it," added his lordship, spoiling the whole effect.

A LONG moment followed in which Nature stood still, breathless. The Achillea stood still. So did the Bignonia Radicans. So did the Campanula, the Digitalis, the Euphorbia, the Funkia, the Gypsophila, the Helianthus, the Iris,

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the Liatris, the Monarda, the Phlox Drummondi, the Salvia, the Thalictrum, the Vinca, and the Yucca. From far off in the direction of the park there sounded the happy howls of children who were probably breaking things, but even these seemed hushed. The evening breeze had died away.

Angus McAllister stood glowering. His attitude was that of one sorely perplexed. So might the early bird have looked if the worm earmarked for its breakfast had suddenly turned and snapped at it. It had never occurred to him that his employer would voluntarily suggest that he sought another position, and now that he had suggested it Angus McAllister disliked the idea very much. Blandings Castle was in his bones. Elsewhere he would feel an exile. He fingered his whiskers, but they gave him no comfort.

He made his decision. Better to cease to be a Napoleon than be a Napoleon in exile.

"Mphm," said Angus McAllister.

"Oh, and by the way, McAllister," said Lord Emsworth, "that matter of the gravel path through the yew alley. I've been thinking it over, and I won't have it. Not on any account. Mutilate my beautiful moss with a beastly gravel path? Make an eyesore of the loveliest spot in one of the finest and oldest gardens in the United Kingdom? Certainly not. Most decidedly not. Try to remember, McAllister, as you work in the gardens of Blandings Castle, that you are not back in Glasgow, laying out recreation grounds. That is all, McAllister. Er—dash it—that is all."

"Mphm," said Angus McAllister.

He turned. He walked away. The potting-shed swallowed him up. Nature resumed its breathing. The breeze began to blow again. And all over the gardens birds who had stopped on their high note carried on according to plan.

Lord Emsworth took out his handkerchief and dabbed with it at his forehead. He was shaken, but a novel sense of being a man among men thrilled him. It might seem bravado, but he wished—yes, dash it, he almost wished—that his sister Constance would come along and start something while he felt like this.

He had his wish.

"Clarence!"

Yes, there she was, hurrying towards him up the garden path. She, like McAllister, seemed agitated. Something was on her mind.

"Clarence!"

"Don't keep saying 'Clarence!' as if you were a dashed parrot," said Lord Emsworth, haughtily. "What the dickens is the matter, Constance?"

"Matter? Do you know what the time is? Do you know that everybody is waiting down there for you to make your speech?"

Lord Emsworth met her eye sternly.

"I do not," he said. "And I don't care. I'm not going to make any dashed speech. If you want a speech, let the vicar make it. Or make it yourself. Speech! I never heard such dashed nonsense in my life." He turned to Gladys. "Now, my dear," he said, "if you will just give me time to get out of these infernal clothes and this ghastly collar and put on something human, we'll go down the village and have a chat with Ern."

Some Features in the Christmas "Strand"

The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner
P. G. WODEHOUSE

The Hidden Witness "SAPPER"

The Head of the Postmaster-General
H. de VERE STACPOOLE

My Mermaid and the Giants
C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

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The Mascot

By

H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Illustrated by
GILBERT WILKINSON

I.

NO, sir (said Captain Barttels), you can't tell me anything about the Ivory Coast, or any other part of that coast right from Bathurst to Walfisch Bay, nor anything about the kroomen or the longshore sharks or the missionaries or the witch doctors. I was seven years in the Blue Ball line running from Liverpool to Jibutil and Lagos, and two years master of the *Clydebanker*, belonging to the McRimmons of Fenchurch Street. Took passengers as well as cargo: traders, prospectors, missionaries, and such. I've seen strange things with passengers in old times; I've took chaps out that were as dry as Pussyfoot Johnson and respectable as Holy Joe, and I've fetched them back after a couple of years of the coast howlin' card-playing delirium trimenses, that or else with livers as big as their heads. That was in the old times, which were a lot different from nowadays. Some of them stuck it, but not many, and if they weren't hit in their bodies they were hit in their minds, believing in fetishes and Ju-jus and mascots and all such-like.

What are you saying? I know, I'm not denying that I said a minit ago that I held with mascots. I'm not one of the chaps that go about with their noses cocked in the air disbelievin' in everything they can't weigh up and measure, but there's mascots and mascots, as I was going to say before you cut in on me, some that works backward as well as for'ard, same as Heasley's, the chap I had in my mind to tell you of.

He come out with us in '92, fine, upstanding young feller, good-looking, with a rich grandfather, a coal-owner or something like that, who gave him all he wanted in the way of money and who'd made his will in his favour, and being over eighty-five he was as good as dead, you might say, and the fortune as good as in Heasley's pocket. Ten thousand a year it amounted to, and this guy, instead of sitting at home waiting for it to fall into his lap, was coming off to the West Coast to shoot gorillas.

Why, them things will pull a man to pieces as easy as you'd skin a banana, and here was this chap with ten thousand a year overdue to drop into his pocket risking it.

"Why," I said to him, "if I was in your shoes I'd be walking about with body-guards and a flannel chest-protector on me, back and front—and besides, leaving the gorillas, there's the natives, and leaving them there's the fever. Much good your money will do you if you come out of that place with your teeth chatterin' with the ague."

Might as well have talked to a Hindu image. He'd always wanted to hunt gorillas since he'd read a book about gorilla hunting when a boy, and when a man gets fixed like that there's nothing for it but to give him his head and let him get on with it.

I didn't say no more—and I saw him off the ship at Jibutil, him and his luggage and his guns and chop-boxes and tents, and ashore he goes to hunt the gorillas, and by the stories I've been told they had it all fixed up for hunting him as well.

Gorillas don't go about in droves, as some silly fool said they did in a book I was readin'; they stick to family parties, father and mother and sons and daughters, and they're pretty united families, as a rule, to judge by Heasley's yarns, for I picked him up

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I saw him off the ship at Jibutil, him and his luggage and his guns and chop-boxes and tents

for the return voyage nine months after I had landed him, and he come aboard with all his guns, and not one of them lost, and his trunks and his bags and his tents, not to speak of skins and tusks and a live parrot in a cage.

I thought all his dunnage was aboard from the lighter when up comes a mat basket, and out of it tumbles a nigger baby.

I was on the bridge, the lighter was shoving for shore, and Jones, the first officer, had rung up the engine-room, when looking over I saw the thing crawling about on the deck and Heasley standing watching it like a happy father, which he couldn't have been, seeing its colour and the fact that it was nearer a two-year-old than a one-year.

II.

HE'D bought it for fun from a nigger woman when he'd been on the razzle-dazzle the day before, and he'd woke up in the mornin' to find himself *in locum parentis*, so to speak—also with a head.

He'd woke up remembering the chaps at Short's Hotel, which is the only one at Jibutil, guying him for carting the thing into the hotel veranda same as if it was a dog he'd bought; he remembered the buying of it, which he'd done mostly to make people laugh, him being, as I've told you, gone in drink. It all seemed like a dream, but there, when he woke, sure enough was the goods.

He tried to get the hotel man to get rid of it, but they couldn't find the woman; she'd sold it for a dollar and left it at that, maybe reckoning that she'd have to refund the money if the chap caught her when he was sober—left town most likely she had, and there he was fixed. Couldn't get rid of it nohow, so brought it on board same as it might have been a cockatoo or a monkey.

"What's that you've got there?" I calls down to him from the bridge.

"It's a mascot," says he, laughin' up at me, and the words were scarce out of his mouth when the steward, who was coming up the cabin companion-way with a tray of glasses and a bottle of whisky, slipped and smashed the lot and near brained himself.

"Yes," I says, "that's a mascot sure enough. One of the ones that work the wrong way about," and that night after dinner I got at him again over the business.

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"By your own account," I said, "the Almighty has saved you half-a-dozen times from your own tomfoolery in hunting gorillas; you've escaped the fever, and the natives haven't cut you up; you haven't been bit by snakes nor gored by rhinoceruses, and yet you've got the nerve to come aboard this ship talking about mascots.

"You've had a two-man's share of good luck, and yet you come aboard this ship talkin' of mascots. What more could a mascot do for you? Going full speed ahead, so to speak, for your grandad's fortune and the 'islands of the blest'"—and I hadn't got more than that far when the ship gave a dudder, and I slipped on deck, and there we were with the starboard propeller gone. The shaft had snapped off like a carrot, same as if that black mascot had bit it, which I'm not so sure it hadn't.

I'm just telling you all that happened round about that thing, and you may draw your own conclusions, but don't draw them till I've finished and given you all the particulars of how that thing served Heasley, let alone how it served me.

McRimmon had given me instructions to call at Las Palmas on the way to pick up a female relative of his by name of MacBean and bring her along to London, she and her maid. There was no cargo to be taken, nothing but this old woman who looked like a ha'porth of sour apples and had been out startin' a missionary station to convert the Canary Islanders into Anabaptists or somethin' like that; she came on board with green spectacles on her, she and her maid, and the maid was a peach. She was a nectarine. I guess she converted more Canary Islanders than the old woman, and the first thing she does when she come up the companion ladder was to give the glad eye to Heasley. I'm talking of the maid, not the old woman.

III.

I WAS standing looking on and I saw the goods delivered and the receipt given, and thinks I to myself there'll be trouble here.

You know those sorts of feelings that come up like bubbles from nowhere. I said nothing, there was nothing to say, not till I got Heasley alone, and then I tackled him.

"That's a girl to be careful of," says I.

"Which girl?" says he, as though a raft of girls had come on board.

"The one in spectacles," says I, and turned on my heel and left him. You can't save some folk: it's only a waste of time trying, and I had the ship to look after.

IV.

IT began with the propeller. The old MacBean woman took it as a personal insult, the losin' of that propeller. I explained to her that it'd be better for her to take the next mail boat as we'd be limping home and using canvas to make out and might have a rough time if we met bad weather, but she said she reckoned she'd stick it. I'd given her my cabin, and she never said "Thank you." She hove out things that I didn't want moved, and wanted in things that couldn't be fetched, and cut and carried on so that, I tell you, no sooner had we got the Peak astern than I did what I'd never done before and prayed for foul weather. What come was a sea without a move on it and a light following wind so that the old woman was able to get about on deck with her stick. She had a stick with a rubber ferrule on it, and she'd stump about poking her nose into odd corners as if she was looking for sinners; and it wasn't long before she saw Heasley with that nigger piccaninny in his arms, for he'd took to it amazing, same as it might be a dog, and with him was Louisa the maid laughing and talking and he showing her the child.

It only wanted that to set the old woman's works going. She called the maid and went into the cabin with her and shut the door, and as the cabin was mine I stood close to the port on the starboard side and listened, and I heard old jelly-bags going for the girl.

"What were you sayin' to that young feller?" asks she.

"Nothing," said the maid.

"Then what were you talking about?" says she. "You and him making disgraces of yourselves before the whole ship, him standing there nursing that nigger baby."

"Which nigger baby?" asks the girl.

"Don't you be answerin' me," says she. "Which nigger baby?—the one he was holding in his arms and you was ticklin'."

"Oh, that," said the girl. "What about it?"

"I tell you not to be answerin' me back," cries the old woman. "I've had enough of your answers and enough of your tantrums and enough of your ways with men. *I've* seen you. Your carryin's on have been a disgrace to missionary work and a thorn in the side of the faithful; *I've* seen you. You haven't been thinking God was watchin' you; followin' your own devices and desires and the wickedness of your own heart, you didn't know my eye was on you; and long ago I'd have spoken only I didn't want to make a disturbance in foreign parts and missionary circles. I wanted to get you home first, and now when I thought I had you safe on board this ship—look at you. The captain wanted me to wait for the mail

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boat, and waited I would rather than travel at the danger of my life in this cockroach trap, but d'ye think I hadn't in my mind what your goings on might have been in a ship like that full of men and officers?"

"What goings on?" says the girl.

"What goings on?" answers the old woman. "Well you know what goings on, standin' there like a brazen hussy throwing my words in my mouth. What about the hotel clurk in the hotel we just left? What about that Spanish man who followed us all down the street talking to you——"

"They all do that in Spain," answers she, and at that, though it was the truth, the old woman blows up.

"I discharge you from my service," she cries, "for insolence, without notice. That's the law."

"What's the law?" says the girl.

I took notice that the girl was fighting the old woman mostly by stuffing back her own words into her mouth, which was easy to do and pretty effectual, the way it seemed to raise the old girl's dander. It was as interesting as a fight between an orca and a bow-head, for the girl was always going, so to speak, for the old woman's tongue; but it was near at an end, for the old woman was losing wind.

"You can go your own way," says she. "I have done with you; as you have made your bed so must you lie on it; a fool and his folly are never parted; more poisonous than an asp is the tongue of a light woman."

She was bringing up the texts like a bilge pump when the girl says:—

"Oh, go to—heaven."

Only it wasn't heaven she said. I tell you that.

V.

WHILST I was listening I was standing with one eye on Heasley and the mascot; then the door burst open and out comes the girl, pushed by the old woman, who'd fair lost her head; the girl naturally resisting, the old woman gave her a big smack, and at sight of this Heasley drops the child and runs to get between them.

The whole of this business was to lose me my ship with McRimmon, but I couldn't do

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otherwise than I did, for the old woman was all in the wrong.

I told her straight to get back to her cabin, and she did, and stuck there like a hutched badger till we reached London river with the tugs waitin' for us at the docks. Then she bunked ashore for McRimmon's office to lay an objection to my treatment of her—but I'll be tellin' you about that in a minute; what I want to say is the girl didn't go ashore not till next morning, and then she went having borrowed half of Heasley's ready money off him, promising to meet him at the Cannon Street Hotel at one o'clock to make arrangements about being married at a register office or some such rubbish.

I had too much on my hands to bother myself about what they did, for when I went to McRimmon's I found him poisoned against me. We had a row, and "Be damned to you," said I, cutting off relationships with him, but managing the same day to get a berth with the Red Stripe people as master of the *Monabonga*, two thousand seven hundred-ton tramp, using the same coast.

But I'm forgetting Heasley and the girl. All of which he told me afterwards. Cannon Street Hotel he went to by appointment to meet her. Him and the baby, and can't you see him standing about waiting for her? It's all very well people bringing a thing like that home same as they'd bring a parrot or a monkey, but the bother is a black piccaninny isn't a parrot, and the sight of a young fellow toting round with one is apt to give rise to remarks.

Then there was Cannon Street Hotel. Ever been there? It seemed to Heasley that where he didn't find board meetings in full blast he opened the doors to find luncheon parties just beginning. She hadn't told him specially where to meet her, just said Cannon Street Hotel, and he, being a sucker, had said, "Right-ho!"

But it wasn't "Right-ho!" at half-past one and him hungry and the child beginning to squall. It was big enough to walk with a bit of assistance and it was dressed in a flannel petticoat and shirt sort of business made for it by a Belgian soldier's wife who had been on board, and she'd made it a hat that was too big for it—at least, that was the impression it gave one—kind-hearted woman, but those sorts don't always make the best milliners—anyhow, it's my belief it was the child's get-up that made that young girl shy at joining up with Heasley.

He waited till two and then trailed off to the reception office with it. He sent a messenger boy for a couple of bananas for it, and it was eating one as he stood by the reception clerk's counter booking a room for two.

"It's for me and a child," said he, "so it must have a crib in it." "Where's the child?" says the reception clerk. "Here,"

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Cannon Street Hotel he went to by appointment to meet her. Him and the baby.

says Heasley, lifting it, hat and all, above the counter so that the chap nearly had a fit, and then he apologizes and rings for a chambermaid, and says, "Take this gentleman's little boy——"

"It isn't mine," says Heasley.

"Then," says the other, "whose is it?"

"I picked it up on the West Coast," says H. "It's a mascot."

"Anyhow, you're travelling with it," says the clerk.

They say a reception clerk at a hotel only laughs once a year, and that's only for exercise, and this chap having laughed before his time, so to speak, closed up exhausted and goes on to the chambermaid: "Room forty-five," he says, "and get a crib put in it; you can take charge of it if the gentleman wants to go out—get it some nuts."

"Excuse me," says Heasley, ruffling up, "but its diet is my affair."

"Pardon," says the clerk, and goes back to his books whilst the other two and the chambermaid take the lift.

VI.

HE hadn't more than stepped out of the lift coming down when he ran into the arms of Holbeck Fishermann, the company promoter, who had been with him on the boat coming out to Jibutil, but he'd got back before him.

"Oh, there you are," says Fishermann. "I was thinking of you only yesterday. Remember on the boat I told you I was going out to inspect that copper proposition? Well, my boy, it's there. It's there

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sure enough; those hills to south-east of Bongo Bongo are solid copper; there's enough copper there to make a preserving pan that'd stew the earth. Easy worked, infinite abundance of copper—these times—Lord!"

Heasley stood there licking his lips like a dog at a butcher's stall.

"I'd like to be in on that," said he.

"And you shall," replies Fishermann. "If you come to my office at eleven sharp to-morrow morning I'll see that you get two hundred shares allotted to you—five bob shares. You'll have to pay a few pounds down, but they'll be at a premium by to-morrow night."

"I can do that," says Heasley, and they go to the bar and have a drink.

"By Jove," he says as he stands with his whisky-and-soda in his hand, "but the mascot's working."

"What mascot?" asks Fishermann.

"Oh, it's a thing I found on the West Coast," says Heasley, and then parted, promising to meet next day.

When he'd come on board with it that morning at Jibutil he'd called it a mascot more for fun and to give it a name than for any other reason, but the idea had stuck, and it seemed to him now that perhaps there was something in it.

He went and had a good dinner that night, and went to the theatre and didn't get back till twelve o'clock, pretty well tanked, for those were the times when the bars kept open late; and when he looked into the crib he saw two children instead of one till he shut one eye and knew it was all right.

Next morning when he'd finished breakfast, which was pretty late, and just as he was preparing to go out, down comes the chambermaid, to say that the kid was gone.

Up he rushes.

The crib was empty sure enough. It was gone. But wherever it had gone to it hadn't taken its hat or its clothes.

Hunt! I should think they did hunt, along the corridors and up the back stairs and down the lifts and out on the roof. They sent for grapnels to drag the big water-tank of the hotel for fear it might have got into it, the water being drinking water, and they were setting to work in the basement to see if it had got down to the kitchens when word came that it was found.

Hiding under the bed near the hot-water pipes it had been all the time.

"Thank goodness," says Heasley, then he looks at his watch, and it was eleven.

He sings out for a taxi and offers the driver ten bob extra if he gets him to Fishermann's office in five minutes. Consequence was they ran over a boy in Cannon Street and the taxi-man's number was taken for furious driving and Heasley's name and address as witness, but as he had the presence of mind to give the name of Mr. Brown, of the Star and Garter, Richmond, it didn't matter.

What mattered was the delay in getting to Fishermann's. It was past half-past eleven when he got there, and Fishermann said, "You're too late—lists closed at eleven. *Why* didn't you get here in time?"

"Why didn't I get here in time?" sings Heasley. "I reckon you'd know why if you'd been hunting all the morning for a dam' nigger——" Then he pulled up, for he'd come blam face to face with his own stupidity.

You see, the chap was a bit eccentric, as you might say, and it was more eccentricity than stupidity that'd landed him in this mess.

I don't mind so much his bringing the thing on board, for the drink was still on him a bit and he wasn't quite as a man ought to be facin' a business contract, but what I do mind was the way he turned down my advice at the docks, where I'd tried to persuade him to leave it at a place I knew where the missionaries would have taken charge of it. Not he. It was the same as a sailor bringing home a monkey or parrot, and he was looking forward to showing it to his people (that was just where his eccentricity came in, not seein' what it was and the fact that he was in the home country, not in southern parts, where a nigger doesn't show up against the surroundings, so to speak).

"Well," said Fishermann, "it may be more profitable hunting for niggers in London than buying copper shares at five shillings each to be sold at ten or maybe twenty pounds, and when you've started a company to carry on your job you'll let me know, won't you?" says he, for he was ratty at the manner of the other, and out walks Heasley without saying as much as good day, and back he goes to the hotel for his luggage and the menagerie. For he was due to go down to his people in Surrey, and he'd had about enough of London.

VII.

THEY tell me you write for the magazines, mister. If you've got a call on any of them, they'd maybe print what Heasley done with that kid and all I m telling you so's to warn others not to do likewise. I'm not hinting that nigger children are easy to be come by or that every fool could act like Heasley, but I'm saying there's heaps like him who go about the world simply picking up trouble and sticking

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She read his fortune in his hand and told him all she knew about him, most of which he'd told her and the rest of which she'd picked up from his mother in days gone by.

to it when picked up like that old setter Captain Masterman down the street here bought for seven-and-six, because the licence was up, and found it had the mange; didn't get rid of it; barked him out of bed every night, didn't get rid of it; bit the postman, didn't get rid of it; went for a chap on a motor-cycle, with a girl behind him on a pillion, by the leg, smashed the lot, and ran the old captain in for five hundred pounds damages to the relatives and broke its own neck—else I don't believe he'd have made a move to part with it to some other party, let alone droppin' it into the reservoir with a brick tied to a string.

Well, that was Heasley all over, same as Heasley might have been Captain Masterman. They'd have run in double harness and wouldn't have wanted any persuading to make them go.

He knew he'd made a fool of himself at Jibuti, he knew our propeller had dropped off, he knew how the very minute he'd come aboard with it the steward had tumbled down the companion-way and smashed half a sovereign's worth of glasses, to say nothing of a half-full bottle of whisky, he knew the row we'd had with the old MacBean woman, he knew the loss he'd made over them shares with Fishermann, and knowing it all he goes and takes the thing along home.

Row! not a bit of it.

Seemed at first as if he'd done the wisest thing he'd ever be likely to do.

His cousin Maria was taking charge of the house, for the old grandfather was past looking after the servants and had no wife, and she had her children with her, two boys and a girl ranging from six to twelve, and you may imagine they took to the mascot. It

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only wanted a barrel organ to make the thing complete, but that failing they didn't grumble but played with the thing as it was, and Heasley's cousin Maria didn't interfere. She was well enough pleased to let things go as they were going, and meanwhile she was making her plans.

The old gentleman, when he was wheeled about in his Bath chair, used to watch the children at play, and he took a good deal of interest in the new one, and the parson, who was great on missionaries, had it to a missionary meeting to show the village what the missionaries were doing, though how he worked that in is beyond me, and all the time Cousin Maria in the background, as you might say, was fixing her gun.

She'd been studying up Heasley and finding out exactly the sort of exhibition mug he was, and it pained her heart to think of him with ten thousand a year coming to him to be made ducks and drakes of most like and her own children left out in the cold.

She was a woman who went in for reading fortunes in people's hands, and that was her strong suit when she came to play her cards.

Heasley had told her all about himself and his works and the mascot, and how he'd got it, and about me and how I'd told him to get shut of it, and about Fishermann and the copper mine; then she began to play her cards. She read his fortune in his hand and told him all she knew about him, most of which he'd told her and the rest of which she'd picked up from his mother in days gone by. "And now," she says when she'd got him like a hypnotized hen with its nose to a chalk line, "let's see about your future," and, "Oh, my God!" says she after she'd studied his hand for a minute. "Why did you do it?"

"Which?" he asks.

"Bring that child from Africa," she says. "You say the captain said it was a black mascot; it is, and what's going to happen to you is you're going to be hung."

"What for?" asks he.

"Nothing," says she, "and that's the worst part of it; it's all through that child."

"Can't nothing be done?" he asks.

"I'll see," says she, and goes into a trance.

When she came to she told him that the only way of saving himself was to take the thing back to Jibutil. "Put it on the beach," says she, "and leave it there, it's your only chance; that woman you bought it from must have been a witch doctor."

"Wouldn't it do if I took it down to Eastbourne or somewhere along there and shoved it on the beach?" asks he.

"No," she says. "Where you took it from is the only place that's any use."

In a week she had that chap waking the house up at nights with his protestations of innocence to the prison chaplain and his screams when the drop fell, leaving him dangling by the belt of his breeches on the end of a rope tied to a balloon. He said they always hung him like that in his dreams, or else by one foot to a parachute made from an old umbrella and not dependable.

IT was the fear of being hanged drilling into him like a centre-bit all the time and helped by the woman that made him turn round in his tracks and hike back with the kid under his arm, as you might say, coming to me in London when he'd learned I'd been fired by McRimmon, but had got another ship due out for Jibutil in a week.

"I'm coming with you," says he.

"I'm hanged if you are," says I, "not with that thing tied to you."

Then I gave in and took him. I'd got sorter fond of the chap and his troubles, and we had a fine passage out, and he dumped the thing as per directions one starlit night, and we started for home with a full cargo but him in low spirits. He had nothing left to worry about—till we got to Las Palmas, and there was a letter from his sister saying that his grandfather was dead and had revoked his will and left everything to Maria owing to the fact that on thinking things over he disapproved of Heasley's conduct in having married a nigger woman with a black family, and having gone back to her in Africa.

Of course, Maria had been stuffing the old man with lies.

I said to Heasley, "You've had your dose, leave it at that; I told you that thing was a black mascot, meanin' thereby that it was the figurehead of your own stupidity. Now," I says, "cut your losses and don't bother. How much money in the world have you?" I asks.

"Five thousand," says he.

"Then get to work with it," I says, and he did.

I met him two years later helpin' to lade barrels in the docks.

He'd gone to law with Maria and spent the five thousand tryin' to upset the will; said if I hadn't been always urging him to get rid of that thing he wouldn't have taken that woman's advice and gone back to Africa with it, leavin' her to dope his old grandad with lies.

Blamed the whole business on me! same as they always do, which was what made me careful of talkin' of such things to you, seein' that when you come into the bar first I says to myself, "Well, if that chap ain't the spit and image of Heasley—meanin' your face and no offence."

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NEW SERIES. No. 2.

Cases from my Crime Book

H. ASHTON-WOLFE

(Criminologist and former pupil of M. Bertillon.)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The stories which I have selected for this series can be found in the official records, only one or two details having been rearranged in order to avoid giving pain and reopening old wounds.

THE DEVIL'S TELEPHONE.

MY Chief was dictating his final instructions to me before returning to Paris, when Captain Costebelle of the local gendarmerie hurriedly entered the room which had been placed at our disposal. He hesitated a moment before closing the door and coughed apologetically.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Monsieur Bertillon," he murmured, "but there is a man named Dufour, a charcoal-burner from the valley of Valdex, in my office, who declares he has just witnessed a most atrocious crime. When he heard that you were here with experts from Paris he insisted on speaking to you at once. The fellow is almost hysterical, and his ashen face and blue lips at first led me to think that he was either drunk or mad, but his story is so circumstantial that I cannot refuse to investigate."

"Then why come to me?" Bertillon replied, irritably. "I have quite enough work to do, without listening to every crazy peasant who wishes to pose as chief actor in an imaginary drama in order to make himself important. We have wasted a day here investigating a stupid problem which I could have solved in my office, and I wish to reach Paris by noon. Besides, you know that what you suggest is quite against the regulations. You are in authority here and should make your report to the *juge d'instruction.*"

The police officer flushed hotly at the mention of the magistrate; already that morning he had been reprimanded for telephoning directly to the Quai d'Orsay instead of first obtaining permission from the Prefect.

"I know that," he answered, "but Monsieur Domaine and I are not friendly. Besides, the fellow's tale is so grotesque that if it happens to be true I feel sure you will thank me for letting you know before the local authorities destroy all valuable traces in their usual blundering fashion. If a crime has been committed their noisy and elephantine methods will warn the criminal and give him a chance to escape.

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I have always admired your wonderful skill, monsieur. You will at once infallibly point out the true solution, whereas we should accomplish nothing."

Bertillon smiled good-humouredly.

"That is what I call gilding the pill. I fancy the Irish have a word that expresses it even better, eh?" he asked, turning to me.

"Yes," I replied; "blarney is what you mean, but I didn't know it had crossed the Channel."

The Captain grinned delightedly. "I have often heard my mother use the word. She is Irish; but I meant every word I said. Monsieur Bertillon *is* a genius."

Rousseau nudged me slyly.

"I hope it will be more interesting than the case we've been working on," he whispered. "This Normandy village is a deadly place."

Rousseau was right. We had come to St. Pierre de Guise at an urgent call from the officer who now stood in the doorway shuffling his feet and looking foolish, only to find that it was just a sordid crime with not one single outstanding feature.

Seeing that his crude flattery had put our Chief in a good humour, the Captain turned and led the way to his office. As we entered I caught a glimpse of a man in rough fustian sitting near the window, with large grimy hands pressed to his face. He sprang up with a quick, violent movement the instant the door was opened and remained with arms hanging loosely to his sides, looking from one to the other with a fearful yet eager expression. The whites of his eyes were strikingly accentuated by the film of soot that covered his features in large patches. The man's appearance was almost ludicrous; but the twitching of his facial muscles, the slight crust of saliva on his trembling lips, and the tense frozen expression of terror, visible even through the coal-dust, wiped the smiles from our faces. Here was horror, real unmitigated fear and horror, caused by some unexpected event which yet remained, a tangible incubus, oppressing his senses.

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER'S STORY.

THE police officer laid his hand on the man's shoulder with a reassuring gesture.

"Sit down, my friend," he said. "These gentlemen are from the Paris Sûreté. Tell them your story and try to remember all the details. Here, drink a little of this first to steady your nerves"—and he stepped to a cupboard and poured out a stiff dose of cognac. The charcoal-burner gulped it eagerly; then, as Bertillon drew a chair forward, he sank down with a groan, drew a coarse cloth from his pocket, and wiped his hands and mouth.

"I did not know that murder was so terrible," he began, addressing Bertillon, "until I saw one committed before my very eyes. About two hours ago I was coming through the forest with a load of logs. I sleep in a hut near my fires, and go out at dawn for wood. I was just crossing the sandy hollow near the Witches' Pool, and had stopped to light my pipe, when I suddenly heard a man laughing. Oh, but laughing! I say a man, but it sounded more like the voice of a devil. It resembled the noise I once heard a fellow make who had drunk raw spirits until he became mad. A mixture of scream and snarl. Of course I was startled, and twisted round quickly to see who was making that horrible noise. You know the valley, Captain?" the man asked, turning to the police officer. "It is a wide, round open space. Nothing but rocks and sand. Trees won't grow there. People say it was once a place where witches and sorcerers met to dance. Lots of bones were found under the stones by a professor from Rouen. I know because I helped him to dig them up. Well, although the horrible sound had been close by me, there was no one in sight. And still shrieks and groans and that awful laughter sounded in my ears; but the moment I ran to the edge of the forest it stopped.

"I searched among the bushes, running from tree to tree, but there was no one there. I gave it up at last, thinking someone was having a joke with me, and walked back to where I had left my wood. And then, as I stooped to pick up the sack, you know, a wild yell came from behind me, and I heard someone cry:—

"'Alive still, are you, accursed witch? Alive and ready to torture me once more with your crazy jealousy? I'll kill you and make sure this time that you don't come back.' The words were quite plain, and as I looked up I saw, not ten feet away, a man dressed only in trousers and shirt, with a knife in his hand. It was one of those old-fashioned knives we Normandy peasants used years ago. This one had a curved black handle and a wicked blade that flashed in the sun. The man was holding a woman by the throat and stabbing at her.

"I shouted, 'Stop! Stop, you assassin!' and rushed towards him, but my foot caught in the rope I had used to carry the sack. I fell on my face in the sand, and when I scrambled to my feet the man and woman had disappeared. I ran all the way here to report what I had seen. The gendarmes think I'm mad, but I swear, sir, I am perfectly sane and sober. A dreadful murder has been committed. They told me Captain

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Costebelle was with detectives from Paris, so I waited to tell you my story. You won't think me crazy, will you? I seem still to hear those cries and that awful laughing. I know I shall never forget what I saw."

"Can you describe the man?" Bertillon asked, pulling out his notebook.

"Certainly, sir. He was tall and thin, with a short beard and black hair."

"He had no hat, then?"

"No, sir; and I noticed the trousers were dark grey and the shirt blue with a broad stripe."

"What was the woman like?" Bertillon demanded.

"I couldn't see the face clearly. He seemed to be swinging her from side to side, but she had curly hair and wore a white dress with long sleeves, almost like a nightgown."

"Are there any houses near the place where you say all this happened?"

"No, sir; no one lives in the forest but myself; and even my cabin is an hour's walk from the valley."

"Yet you say these mysterious people were only partly clad. In fact, you suggest the woman wore nothing but a nightgown. Where could they have come from?"

"I don't know, sir, but I saw them as plainly as I see you now."

"You are sure you remember the exact words he used?"

"Oh, yes, sir—they are still ringing in my ears."

"Very well. We'll come with you to this valley. Is it far?"

"Yes, several kilometres; we must walk through the forest."

"You have a car?" Bertillon asked, turning to Captain Costebelle.

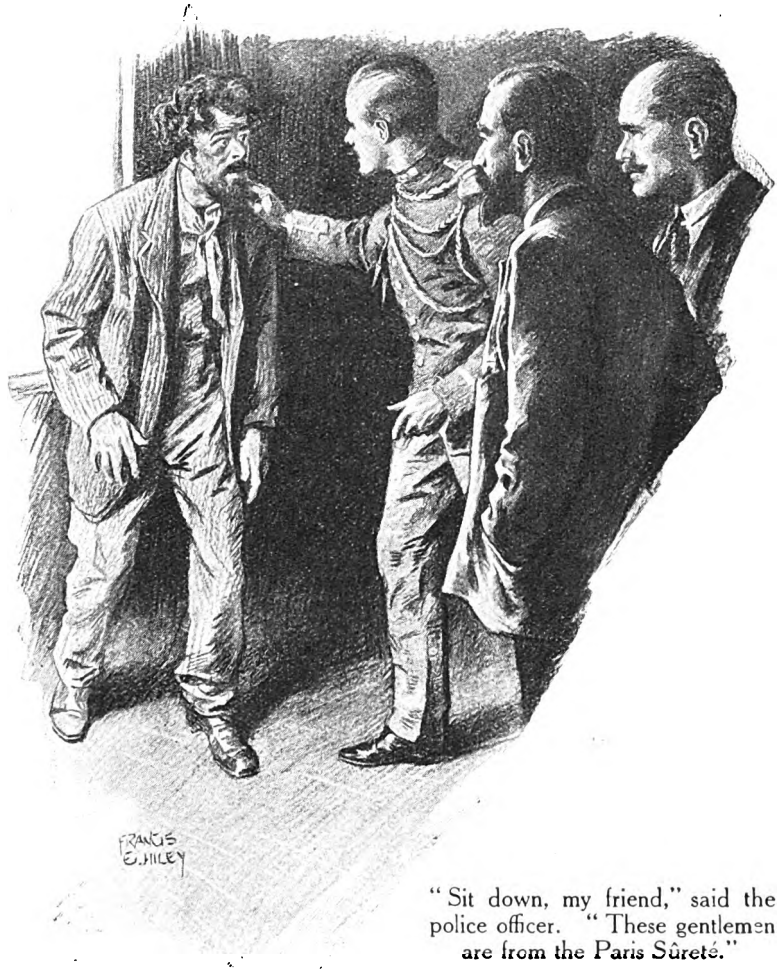
"Certainly, sir; it can take you part of the way, but the path to the Witches' Pool is too narrow for a vehicle."

WE VISIT THE WITCHES' POOL.

WE alighted at the edge of a vast wood of oaks and silver birches, and followed our guide to a clearing which looked like a prehistoric amphitheatre. Huge spear-shaped rocks fringed a flat sandy space five or six hundred feet in diameter. Dufour pointed with trembling hand to a large sack lying not far away.

"There is where I dropped my wood. My pipe must be close beside it, and a little distance away is the spot where I saw the woman stabbed."

"Did she not cry out?" Bertillon asked, thoughtfully.



"Sit down, my friend," said the police officer. "These gentlemen are from the Paris Sûreté."

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"No, I don't think she did, sir. But then he was holding her by the throat. Besides, I was so horrified that I don't really remember."

My Chief beckoned to me and we walked slowly towards the sack. Bertillon stooped every now and then and examined the footprints.

"So far the man's tale is true," he muttered. "The marks he left are deep and close together owing to the weight of the burden he carried——" He picked up a burnt match—"That was when he tried to light his pipe, and there is the pipe. H—m—m, tobacco only partly ignited. Obviously he was startled and dropped it before he had taken more than one or two puffs. Now let us see where the man and woman came from. But take care not to step on their footprints."

A QUARTER OF AN HOUR passed whilst my Chief examined the ground carefully within a radius of fifty feet. Abruptly he turned and looked at me with brows lifted in surprise.

"Not a sign," he exclaimed. "Yet on this soft ground they would leave clear impressions. Is the man mad after all? Absolutely nothing, nor any place where they could have hidden. Where did you see the crime committed?" he called to the charcoal-burner, who was standing with the officer some distance away. The fellow approached the spot where he had dropped his logs and gazed earnestly in our direction.

"Just where you are now, sir," he cried, after measuring the distance with his eyes.

While Bertillon looked around perplexedly, Rousseau bent down and tried to lift the heavy sack; as he did so he gave vent to a shout of surprise: "Come here, Chief! I can hear someone speaking."

Bertillon and I both ran quickly to where Rousseau was stooping, one hand held to his ear. "You can only hear the voices when you bend down," he added. "Yet they are quite loud and seem to come from the spot where you were standing a moment ago."

Bertillon knelt beside my colleague, his face flushed with excitement. Then he rose and gazed searchingly at the belt of trees. The unceasing monotonous drone and chirp of insects wove an undercurrent of sound against which the actual silence seemed the more oppressive. Only now and then from far away came the faint hum of a passing car. Yet there was some latent influence in the atmosphere of the valley that made me feel as though at any instant a nameless and fearsome power could erupt into violent action. For several minutes we remained motionless and expectant, then with a shrug of his shoulders Bertillon turned and walked towards the trees behind us. Rousseau remained kneeling on the sand, an expression of wonder on his rugged features. Abruptly he raised his hand and beckoned to me.

"Voices again, but much fainter!" he cried. "Here, near the ground." He seized my arm and pulled me towards him. As my head came level with his, it was as though a door had suddenly opened on a room full of people. First I perceived only a dull, unmeaning babble. But as I bent still lower the sounds seemed to rush to a focus and increased in power. It was a confused clamour, from which a man's voice detached itself at regular intervals and I clearly distinguished the words, "Monsieur, monsieur," repeated several times.

Following upon this call came a pounding as of sticks against a sheet of metal. I could not repress a shout of surprise at the strangeness of it all. There we were in a sandy plain, no one but ourselves in sight, yet I appeared to be surrounded by an excited, yelling crowd. When I shifted my position the noise instantly ceased. Again, when I bent my head I heard the same inexplicable medley of voices—as though at that one spot I entered another world—invisible but akin to our own. It was uncanny and terrifying.

I turned to see what Bertillon was doing and perceived him thoughtfully examining a queer concave rock which towered to a great height some distance behind us. His apparent indifference surprised me. I could not tear myself away from the fascination of this unprecedented phenomenon. The unconscious love of the mystic and supernatural, which lies deep down in the fibres of every human being, set my nerves tingling. And then brutally and unexpectedly, as though the phantom door had closed again, the clamour ceased completely, just as Bertillon came towards us. In his eyes was the gleam I knew well.

"We have stumbled by chance on a miracle of minute adjustment," he exclaimed. "What we hear is probably miles away. The sounds are reflected in some strange fashion by that cup-shaped rock near the trees, and come to a focus at this spot, and only here. How they travel across that sandy plain I cannot conceive. You are sure that you *saw* the man with the knife?" he demanded abruptly of the charcoal-burner, who was still standing motionless beside the Captain of gendarmes. At the question he started as though waking from a trance.

"Certain, monsieur, absolutely certain. I'd know him again at once."

"Very well—leave your sack and come with us. We'll trace this devil's telephone

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to its starting point. Spread out on each side and examine the ground, all of you. I'll walk in front. There may be footprints, but I fancy we shall find nothing until we get to the fringe of the wood."

Slowly we crossed the arena of fine sand, but the surface was smooth and even, and we saw nothing except some tiny trails where rabbits had scampered to cover. Bertillon halted a short distance from the first row of oaks.

"Look!" he cried, pointing at a broad granite slab. "The business grows ever queerer. I wonder if the formation is natural, or whether the old Gallic priests conceived it? This valley was undoubtedly used in their day for magic phenomena and must have been the scene of many strange rituals. The stone is so placed that it relays and amplifies every sound that comes from the funnel formed by those trees. There is a long, narrow passage right through them, and rocks have been carried there in the past so that nothing can grow to obstruct it. Yet from the opposite side the forest appears dense and continuous. What a discovery for our archæologists! But for the moment we are hunting for a criminal. I shall return later and examine this strange place thoroughly."

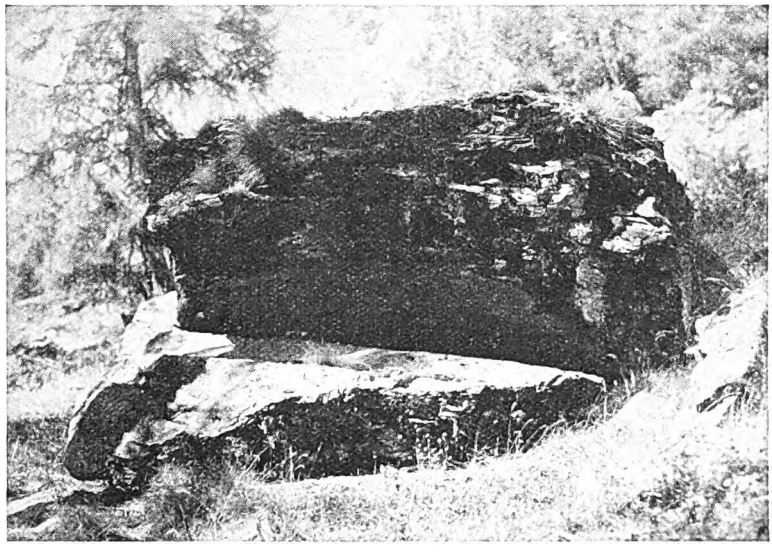
BERTILLON GIVES UP.

ALTHOUGH we walked until noon, finally arriving at the broad departmental highway, we saw no sign of any likely spot where a struggle such as the woodsman had described could have taken place. At last Bertillon threw up his hands with a helpless gesture.

"It's no use. We shall never find the starting point of those vibrations. Either the sounds transmitted by that prehistoric device are not caused by voices at all and the charcoal-burner merely imagined the laughter and screams, or else the spot from which they originated is far away. One thing is certain: the scene he described so vividly was nothing but an hallucination created by the mysterious and terrifying nature of the acoustic phenomenon. He only fancied he saw the woman stabbed. A species of subjective impression, if you like."

"But I also heard someone speak," I objected. "I distinctly caught the word 'monsieur' repeated several times."

"Well, perhaps you did. We all heard something. Those stones are unquestionably a species of primitive telephone. Probably there was once a pagan god or an oracle in the valley. Dufour may thus actually have heard all that he related, but I am convinced he only imagined the episode of the man and woman. Anyway, if a crime has indeed been committed we shall learn of it. Meanwhile we can do nothing but wait, and our work in Paris is urgent. At present the chances are a thousand to one against finding the exact point of emission. I have heard of whispering galleries, but in every case there was a wall to carry the sound. Here it apparently jumps from point to point." Turning to the Captain of gendarmes he added: "I advise you to say nothing of all this to your *juge d'instruction*; he would only laugh at you. If there should be any development, inform me at once. It would be wise to keep that fellow Dufour from talking also. If there has really been a tragedy enacted somewhere, the murderer is certainly unaware that the echo of it was carried in such an uncanny way through space."



The rock shaped like a mouth with protruding underlip which formed one link in the "Devil's telephone."

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Back in our familiar surroundings at the Quai d'Orsay the whole adventure seemed incredibly fantastic. Rousseau summed up our thoughts by saying :—

" Auto-suggestion, Chief, that's what it was. That sandy place is haunted."

But for once he was wrong. When I arrived at the Sûreté the next morning a surprise awaited me. Bertillon, Colbert, and Rousseau were standing beside one of our fast cars dressed for a journey, and immediately signalled me to join them.

My Chief pulled a paper from his pocket as I hurried up.

" Listen to this," he cried, and his voice had the shrill intonation which betokened great excitement. " From the *Courrier de Brest*. I've had further details by telephone from our friend the Captain. ' Pierre de Verneuil, the last male descendant of one of the oldest Norman families, who had only lately inherited his vast estate, was found dead this morning in a wood in which he often hunted. His face was terribly swollen, as from some poison. Near him lay a knife such as poachers use, with a lock blade and curved handle, The body has not been touched, for the local authorities intend to call in expert assistance from Paris. According to the servants, Monsieur de Verneuil, who was a widower, but about to marry again, had been queer in his ways for some time, so that it may be merely suicide.'

" So much for the newspaper report. Captain Costebelle telephoned early this morning and gave me a detailed description of the dead man, which curiously enough corresponds to the phantom murderer seen by the charcoal-burner. Come along ; we must arrive before anything is moved."

THE PHANTOM KNIFE IDENTIFIED.

AT St. Pierre de Guise we picked up our friend the Captain, who had already sent for Dufour.

" La Ferrière, where de Verneuil lived, is twenty miles from here," the police officer said with a queer catch in his voice. " Fortunately it belongs to my circuit, and I have given strict orders to keep everyone away. The wood is part of the Verneuil estate and surrounded by barbed wire fences."

Two gendarmes were on guard near the body, which was lying on its side in a curiously twisted huddled position. The hands were clenched and purple, and the distorted features fully confirmed the theory that he had been poisoned. The moment Dufour caught sight of the face he started back with a hoarse bellow of alarm.

" I know him. Without a doubt it is the murderer I saw in the Witches' Valley. And the knife, monsieur ! There is the very knife with which he stabbed the woman ! " And his shaking hand pointed to the weapon which lay beside the body.

" All right," my Chief snapped. " Keep back now everybody."

For an hour Bertillon worked feverishly, alternately examining the ground, the dead man, and the dagger. Then he crept cautiously through the undergrowth, scrutinizing the ground at every step. He was gone so long that Rousseau began to mutter impatiently. I could see he was devoured with curiosity and eager to get to the bottom of the mystery. At last the snapping of twigs and rustling of leaves informed us that our Chief was returning. He emerged suddenly from the bushes, flushed and breathless, but a glance at his face showed me that the investigation had not proved successful. Without a word he brushed past us and picked up the knife by the point.

" Smell this," he said, holding it under my nose. " What do you make of it ? "

A queer but agreeable odour emanated from the weapon. It was like a mixture of Oriental perfume and fragrant spices.

I looked up perplexedly. " Would that be the poison which killed de Verneuil ? " I ventured.

" Nonsense ; that's no poison. Ambergris and some aromatic drug. Besides, he has not been stabbed. There are several tiny swollen punctures on his wrist and inside his left hand, but the knife did not make them ! They look more like marks such as the fangs of a venomous snake leave. Devil take the charcoal-burner and his silly story ! There is no sign of a dead woman. I could not follow de Verneuil's footprints beyond the gravel path. Have the body carried to the house, Captain, and apply for a search warrant. Telephone to Paris, Rousseau, and request Dr. Maupert to come here at once with the necessary instruments for a post-mortem. Lebrun had better come with him. Explain what we have found and tell him to bring a microscope and his chemical case. I shall not wait for the magistrate's order, however. We'll examine the house and question the servants immediately. What is the name of the woman de Verneuil intended to marry, Captain ? " Bertillon asked abruptly, as the officer was about to go.

" Mademoiselle Hélène Vautrais. She is an orphan and lives not far away."

" I should be glad if you would request the lady to come to the house, then. I must question her. I shall not need Dufour until I have more data, but tell him not to go back to St. Pierre. I may require him when the lady arrives."

Placing the knife in one of our special

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Madame Eulalia de Verneuil.

cases, Bertillon passed his arm through mine and led me towards a huge grey dwelling, half castle, half manor, which loomed through the trees in the distance.

"This looks more like a case for a priest than for a detective," he said, with a short laugh. "A peasant stops to light his pipe at the one spot where sounds produced twenty miles away come to a focus by means of an incredibly strange combination of acoustic mirrors. The cries and laughter so impress him that he becomes mad and fancies he sees a murder committed. The vision, delusion, mirage, or whatever it was, enables him to describe accurately a man and a weapon which are found the next day. The man is dead, and the only apparent cause of his death are punctures in his hand that look like the bite of a poisonous reptile. Beside him is a knife—the knife seen by Dufour—but instead of bloodstains on the blade there is a strong smell of ambergris. Truly we of the Sûreté have grappled with many strange and grotesque problems, but this one bids fair to stand alone."

"Remember the Raphael Cortez case, sir," I suggested. "You said you would never believe in the supernatural again."

Bertillon pressed my arm and chuckled.

"I do not for a moment believe this crime to be anything but the result of a fantastic and complex chain of circumstances. If that fellow really killed a woman, it is for us to find who she was and where she is hidden, but at all events he appears to have been murdered, and if so I intend to discover who did it. Here we are."

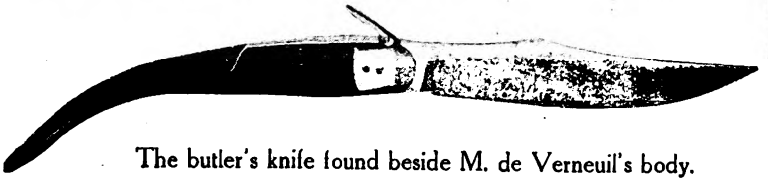
M. de Verneuil, from the photograph on his driver's licence

Mademoiselle Vautrais.

DE VERNEUIL'S BEAUTIFUL FIRST WIFE.

WE had arrived at a huge iron-studded door of forbidding aspect. My Chief pushed it open and we entered a vast hall, dark with heavy beams and oak panelling. Sitting forlornly on a long bench were three men and a girl. We learned that they were the only servants de Verneuil had retained when he inherited the estate. All were loud in their praises of the dead man's generosity; but agreed that he suffered con-

Dulour, the charcoal-burner, discoverer of the "Devil's telephone."



The butler's knife found beside M. de Verneuil's body.

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stantly from spells of melancholia, when he would send them all to their quarters and forbid them to enter the main dwelling. At such times his moods would veer abruptly from a mere desire for solitude to fits of insane rage, from which even the sturdy foresters would flee in terror.

Only the butler, a quiet, shrivelled, grey-haired man, typical of the Normandy peasant stock from which he sprang, appeared singularly reluctant to talk about the dead man, but Bertillon possessed the ability to adapt his manner to the whims of those he wished to question, and succeeded in breaking through the old fellow's reserve. His name was Thomas Ladigue, and he had served the family for forty years. Pierre de Verneuil, we learned, had spent most of his life in Egypt and Tunis, where he had married a very beautiful and wealthy Greek. From that moment constant misfortune dogged him. His business, which had been prosperous, declined rapidly in spite of unceasing toil. He had come to France in obedience to an urgent summons from the family's legal advisers, only to find that he was in danger of losing the heavily-mortgaged estate which he had but lately inherited. Then, just as he was about to return to Egypt, the news came that his wife was dying. He arrived too late to see her alive again. Thereupon de Verneuil had definitely settled down at La Ferrière. It was rumoured that the dead wife's money had enabled him to free the estate from the incubus of ever-increasing liabilities.

"There was a portrait of a very beautiful dark-eyed woman in master's bedroom," the butler added, thoughtfully. "It was always hidden by a velvet curtain, but once when I entered in response to the bell I saw Monsieur de Verneuil standing before it with a corner of the drapery lifted. His expression when he turned and saw me was so terrible that I dropped the letters I had brought and ran from the room."

"He was still mourning her loss, you think?" Bertillon asked.

A mixture of doubt and aversion flickered across the butler's face.

"I cannot say, monsieur—but—well, on that day it had seemed to me as though he hated her. The next morning the maid came to me with the news that the painting had disappeared."

"Well—that is natural enough, since he was about to marry again. He would not wish to offend his *fiancée* by keeping the picture where she would constantly see it. What kind of woman is this Mademoiselle Vautrais?"

"Very proud and reserved, monsieur. The Vautrais were once great aristocrats. But it would never have been a happy union. She is not liked in the neighbourhood. No one ever saw her smile! He needed someone young and jolly. However, poor Master Pierre is dead. It breaks my heart to think of that. I was already here when he was only a lad, lively and full of mischief."

"Have you any idea who killed him? Did anything occur within the last month which would help us to discover the murderer?"

The butler's face assumed a stony, wilfully stupid expression and he shook his head slowly.

"I am only an old servant, sir; I know nothing of my poor master's private affairs."

Bertillon shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, conduct us to his study and bedroom, and when my men come, send them to me. By the way, did you ever see any other woman here, any visitors more than usually intimate?"

"Never; master lived a very quiet life. Hunting and fishing were his only pleasures. There was no other woman."

Bertillon nodded, and, preceded by the servant, we climbed the wide staircase to the first floor. The study was a large room, with countless books on shelves and in cases. Near the window stood a large, old-fashioned writing table; several comfortable chairs were scattered about; and in a corner was a typewriter on an American roll-top desk. Signing to the butler to leave us, Bertillon walked slowly along each wall, examining the volumes.

"A man's books are a certain guide to his character, but these were here before de Verneuil came. I do not think he read much. Sit down while I examine his papers."

THE MYSTERY OF THE COFFIN.

DE VERNEUIL had been a tidy man, and as letter after letter was unfolded and put away again Bertillon gave vent to his growing irritation.

"It's not likely that so methodical a man will have left anything compromising lying about; yet—ha! this is curious," he suddenly exclaimed. "A letter of advice from a shipping firm in Marseilles and a bill for the transport of a coffin. Good heavens! Here pinned to it is a permit from Egypt and a second one from our own people authorizing the admission into France and interment in the family vault of Mme. Eulalia de Verneuil, deceased in Alexandria."

Bertillon sat down heavily and pulled a cigar from his case, an unusual proceeding. It was the first time I had seen him smoke when busy on an investigation. I was about to leave the room, for I knew from long experience that he disliked to have anyone near him when mentally reviewing all the

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points of a complex investigation, but as I opened the door Rousseau came bustling in to report that the doctor and our analyst Lebrun would arrive shortly. The body had already been carried into the house and placed in the billiard-room adjoining the hall. Bertillon waved us away impatiently. "We must wait until Dr. Maupert discovers how de Verneuil died," he exclaimed. "Sit down and keep quiet." We subsided into chairs and watched our Chief anxiously. His eyes closed, and after a few puffs the cigar remained unheeded in a tray. To anyone unused to his ways Bertillon would have appeared to be asleep, but I knew that when his active brain grappled with a subtle problem his body became an inert shell. In fancy I followed the invisible yet unerring mental processes of his extraordinary mind until I became lost in a drowsy maze of theories. A sharp exclamation from Bertillon caused me to leap from my chair in alarm. He was standing before me with flashing eyes. His face was twitching, and twice he moistened his lips before he succeeded in articulating clearly: "I've got it, I do believe! Where is that knife?"

I handed him the box in which it had been placed. He laid the weapon on a sheet of paper and examined it eagerly with his lenses, muttering incoherently to himself.

"Call the butler," he ordered, abruptly, replacing the weapon with an air of finality.

I was about to obey when the old man himself opened the door and ushered in a tall, austere woman with handsome, regular features, although there was something repellent in the thick-lipped mouth and knitted brows.

"Mademoiselle Vautrais," he announced.

Bertillon bowed.

"You were affianced to Monsieur de Verneuil, I understand," he said, courteously. "Sit down, please, mademoiselle; I should like to put a few questions to you."

"Have you discovered yet who murdered my poor *fiancé?*" the woman asked, in a singularly hard, metallic voice, choosing a seat which placed her face in deep shadow.

"I think so, mademoiselle. Tell me, did Monsieur de Verneuil ever speak about his dead wife to you?"

The woman started nervously.

"That is a strange question to ask of me. What has a dead woman to do with this matter?"

"I may be able to tell you that later. For the moment I beg you will answer me. I take it he did speak to you about her and that the subject was the cause of a quarrel between you. Am I right?"

"We did not quarrel, but he spoke to me about her after I had consented to marry him. I knew he was a widower, of course. One day he mentioned that there was a stipulation in her will that her body should be brought to France and placed in the old family vault if he ever decided to marry again. I did not like the idea and told him so. I know he corresponded with her lawyers about it and received several letters which upset him very much, but he would not tell me what they contained. I believe, however, that her money was to revert to charities if he failed to carry out this condition. Since he had already spent large sums in clearing off the principal mortgages and restoring a ruined wing of the manor, the reimbursement of these sums would have placed him in a very difficult position. Nevertheless, he finally agreed to give way to me. You see, a woman has strange intuitions. I am convinced his wife inserted that clause only because she believed that the arrival of her body at the moment he was to marry again would make her presence a very tangible thing and cause him to feel he was being unfaithful to her memory. She knew his superstitious nature well. If it did not cause him to break off his engagement, it would at least make him very unhappy and perhaps lead to quarrels. She must have been cruelly jealous and possessed the subtlety of the Orient. Otherwise why did she not request him to place her coffin in the family vault immediately after her death? You understand, don't you? If he had done that, her memory would not have been revived in such a brutal fashion just when he had every right to forget."

"And did he make arrangements after all for the transport of her body to France?"

"No, no—he did not. He would have told me so."

"Thank you, mademoiselle. May I request you to leave us a moment? I should like to ask the butler something."

The woman rose at once, but the glance she shot at us from the door was hard and hostile.

THE PHANTOM KNIFE'S OWNER.

THE old butler had stood listening to all this with an ashen face. He looked at my Chief now with terror in his eyes.

Bertillon smiled in friendly fashion.

"There are only one or two details I want to be sure about, Monsieur Ladigue," he said, reassuringly. "You stated that—by the way, here is your knife"—and with a quick movement he held out the weapon found beside the dead man. The butler made a half step forward, then he cried, wildly:—

"Yes, yes, it is mine—but I didn't kill my master."

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Bertillon gave him no time to recover.

"Come, my friend," he said, sharply, "you must tell me all you know. I am not suggesting that you murdered de Verneuil, but you helped to carry the coffin to the vault?"

The old fellow looked round at the door to see if it was shut, then with a gasp, as though impelled to answer against his will, he whispered: "Yes, sir, but I swore an oath that I would tell no one. My poor master fetched the body from Paris at night in his own car, and together we carried it to the vault under the family chapel."

"Well, what then?"

"Nothing, sir. It was almost dawn when we had finished and I left him alone at his request. He wished to pray, he said. I never saw him alive again. He did not come to breakfast, but I had seen that he was in one of his black moods and I did not dare to disturb him. But towards noon I went to the chapel with the chauffeur and a gardener. The vault was locked and no sign of my master. We pounded on the door and called him, but he had gone. In the evening one of the foresters reported that he had seen a man running across some fields dressed only in shirt and trousers. I remembered then that Monsieur de Verneuil had taken his coat off when we moved some of the heavy oak coffins in the vault to make room for the one he had brought. I immediately organized a search party. We hunted all night and came upon him at dawn as you saw him—dead."

"How did he come to have your knife?"

"I lent it to him in the vault to cut the ropes round the outer case."

Bertillon nodded thoughtfully; then he went to the billiard-room and returned a moment later with a large key.

"Is this the key of the vault?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I fancy that is the car from Paris which has just arrived. Show both gentlemen in here. Then get ready to come with me to the chapel."

Dr. Maupert came bustling in with his usual cheery smile, followed by Lebrun carrying a microscope and a bag filled with reactants and test-tubes.

"Get to work on this, Lebrun," Bertillon said, briskly, handing him the butler's knife. Lebrun immediately cleared the table, placed a clean cloth over it, and began unpacking his implements. Bertillon watched his preparations interestedly for a moment, then he led Dr. Maupert into the room where the body lay.

I sat down beside my colleague, who had already adjusted a slide on which he placed some minute particles scraped from the edge of the blade. Almost immediately he peered over his glasses at me with a queer expression.

"Epithelial," he said. "Particles of dried skin and embalmers' spices. Who has been cutting up a mummy?"

"What!" Rousseau and I cried in unison. "Mummy! What do you mean?"

"What I say. There are traces of skin—human, I should say—and several particles of Oriental spices on this knife."

"That's what I thought," Bertillon cried from the door. "Call the butler now and bring lanterns. We'll get to the bottom of all this at last."

WE EXPLORE THE VAULT.

AT the door we were joined by the Captain of gendarmes, who had returned from St. Pierre de Guise with our search warrant.

"I have also brought an order for the arrest of the murderer," he cried, boisterously. "The *juge* filled it in at my request. I know you've cleared up the mystery by now. The name is left in blank, of course."

Bertillon smiled grimly at the officer's sally, but made no remark. Preceded by the old butler, we marched through the park until we came to an old ruined building with unglazed, barred windows, standing in a clearing. Here Bertillon motioned us to wait, and advanced alone, illuminating the ground with his electric torch. Twice I saw him stoop to pick up something from the path. The second time he called to Rousseau to cut a short stake from one of the bushes, which he drove into the ground to mark the spot.

The vault was at the bottom of some crumbling steps under a wide stone slab, and protected by an iron door. The moment this was opened an overwhelming wave of sweet spices swept over us. It was so dense and cloying that we gasped for breath.

Bertillon lifted his light and pointed dramatically to the body of a woman lying against a stone column supporting the roof. While we stood gaping in amazement at the unexpected sight, he stepped quickly forward and dropped to one knee.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" he cried. "It is the most perfect example of the embalmer's art I have ever seen."

We crowded round our Chief and gazed in wonder. Bertillon was right. The handsome, swarthy face might have been that of a woman asleep. Not a blemish, not a stain was to be seen. The lips were red, on the olive skin was the hue of life, and the eyelids, with their long lashes, almost appeared to quiver. Dark, silky hair framed what would have been an exquisite picture but for an expression of feline cruelty and

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"Beautiful! Beautiful!" cried Bertillon. "It is the most perfect example of the embalmer's art I have ever seen."

sneering triumph which pervaded every line and muscle. Silently we waited while Bertillon examined the uncanny face with light and lens.

"Some kind of enamel has been applied to the skin. It is hard like porcelain—listen!" and the point of his finger-nail produced a sharp sound as he tried to scratch the carmine cheek.

His contemptuous attitude grated on my nerves, but I was soon to understand what caused it.

Now, as I stooped lower, I saw that the white gown, which was fastened around the throat by a golden brooch, was slashed and torn, and beneath it were numerous gashes obviously made by the knife Lebrun had examined.

"Come here," Bertillon called, beckoning to the butler, who was gripping Rousseau with frenzied hands, as though seeking to draw sanity from the contact.

"Stand up, man—there is nothing to be afraid of. This woman has been dead many years. You saw that painting once. Tell me, do you recognize the face?"

"Yes—yes, sir. It is the same. But you are wrong. Mme. de Verneuil must have been alive when we carried her in here."

Bertillon gave a short laugh and walked towards a heavy oaken coffin. Although all the screws had been withdrawn, the lid, surmounted by a great silver crucifix, appeared to be tightly shut. On the ground not far away lay a second outer shell.

"Did you help to unpack it?" he asked, turning again to the terrified butler.

"No, sir—master would not let me break the seals. I remember he tested them all to make sure they were intact."

Bertillon examined the rough outer case. "Yes—I see they are Government seals. The harbour authorities merely verified

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them. Every possibility was foreseen. What a devil she was!"

Pulling a hammer from his pocket, he began to tap the coffin. I don't know what it was we expected would happen, but our Chief was evidently following a definite plan. After a while he desisted and scrutinized the top and sides again, then with a long-drawn "Ah!" he stooped and picked up a small silver key.

"Give me a pair of pliers, Rousseau," he said, quietly. With these he grasped one end and inserted it in a lock which I had not noticed until then. It was evidently a spring lock, for the key would not enter, although he exerted considerable pressure.

"Push against the crucifix with a piece of wood," he cried, sharply. "But don't approach too closely." Abruptly, as Rousseau obeyed, there was a vicious snap, the key turned, and, like a flicker of light, numerous tiny, sharp teeth stabbed through the wood around the lock and from the silver cross. At that Rousseau shouted in alarm and staggered back. At once the entire lid lifted and swung open with a metallic clang, and a species of hinged frame rose a foot or more from the empty coffin.

BERTILLON dropped the pliers and wiped his hands and face with a handkerchief.

"What a diabolical contrivance! You understand, don't you? This woman whose body we have just found must have been tigerishly jealous. When she learned that her days on earth were numbered, she made up her mind to prevent de Verneuil from marrying again. We shall find out what the exact stipulation was, but evidently he had to place her coffin in this vault and open it for a last good-bye if he really decided to take another wife. She must have prepared it all long before she died. I dare say she knew all about his mortgaged estate and depended on his need of her money. Once he had spent part of it he was compelled to submit to the clause in her will. She knew also that he would wish to be alone when he opened the coffin. When he tried to insert the key he naturally placed his hand on the crucifix for purchase, and those steel fangs, which are undoubtedly poisoned, pierced his skin. At the same time the lid swung back as you have just seen, and the body, which rested on that hinged frame, rose as though alive. No doubt the man became mad at the vision of this phantom from the past and stabbed at her. It was his insane laughter which the charcoal-burner heard. I found a shred from her gown and some of her hair on the path outside. He must in his frenzy have dragged the body out into the open and then flung it against the column where it now lies. *De Verneuil was murdered by his dead wife and the murder was premeditated!* Well, she is beyond the reach of human justice and our investigation must end here. Come, we have endured enough for to-night. To-morrow we shall test the curious acoustic phenomenon which led us to this place. Without it we should never have discovered how the man died. I believe this crypt to be the starting point of the aerial whispering gallery.

"We will place the body of that she-devil in her death-dealing coffin for to-night, and leave it open. To-morrow workmen shall break those steel fangs and destroy the mechanism. I will also let you have my report, Captain Costebelle. Here is your warrant. Inform the magistrate that we could not make use of it."

We all gave a sigh of relief as the heavy door of the vault slammed shut behind us.

My nerves were badly jangled and I slept little. I was ready to start, therefore, when my Chief summoned me. Rousseau had left for St. Pierre de Guise. It had been arranged that he should note the exact moment at which he heard Bertillon speak, so that we could determine the spot which formed the acoustic base. At noon he returned with copious notes. It was truly from the old Norman vault that the sound waves started on their extraordinary journey through space. They reached Rousseau, standing in the Witches' Valley, two minutes later. He recognized our voices and was able to understand every word. Bertillon spent several days searching for further stones, which he believed must have been placed at calculated intervals to relay and amplify sound, much as an echo is tossed from peak to peak in the mountains, but he was unable to find them. Nor could we ever clear up the mystery of the charcoal-burner's vision. He was taken by the gendarmes to identify Mme. de Verneuil, and declared emphatically that, although he had not seen her face, he recognized the hair and the white gown with the long sleeves.

Bertillon's theory that what Dufour thought he saw was due to a species of telepathy was the only credible explanation, but it satisfied no one.

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The River God

By

ROLAND PERTWEE

Illustrated by
C. E. BROCK, R.I.

WHEN I was a little boy I had a friend who was a Colonel. He was not the kind of Colonel you meet nowadays, who manages a motor showroom in the West-end of London, and wears crocodile shoes and a small moustache and who calls you "old man" and slaps your back independent of the fact that you may have been no more than a private in the War. My Colonel was of the older order—that takes a third of a century and a lot of Indian sun and Madras curry in the making. A veteran of the Mutiny he was, and wore side-whiskers to prove it. Once he came upon a number of Sepoys conspiring mischief in a byre with a barrel of gunpowder. So he put the butt of his cheroot into the barrel and presently they all went to hell. That was the kind of man he was in the way of business.

In the way of pleasure he was very different. In the way of pleasure he wore an old Norfolk coat that smelt of heather and brine and which had no elbows to speak of. And he wore a Sherlock Holmesy kind of cap with a swarm of salmon flies upon it, that to my boyish fancy was more splendid than a crown. I cannot remember his legs because they were nearly always under water, hidden in great canvas waders. But once he sent me a photograph of himself riding on a tricycle, so I expect he had some knickerbockers too, which would have been that tight kind with box cloth under the knees. Boys don't take much stock of clothes. His head occupied my imagination. A big, brave, white-haired head with cherry-red rugose cheeks and honest, laughing, puckered eyes with gunpowder marks in their corners.

People at the little Welsh fishing inn, where we met, said he was a bore, but I knew him to be a god, and shall prove it.

I was ten years old and his best friend. He was seventy-something and my hero.

Properly, I should not have mentioned my hero so soon in this narrative. He belongs to a later epoch, but sometimes it is forgivable to start with a boast, and now that I have committed myself I lack the courage to call upon my Colonel to fall back two paces to the rear, quick march, and wait until he is wanted.

The real beginning takes place, as I remember, somewhere in Hampshire on the Grayshott Road, among sandy banks, sentinel firs, and plum-coloured wastes of heather. Summer holiday time it was, and I was among folks whose names have since vanished like lizards under the stones of forgetfulness. Perhaps it was a picnic walk —perhaps I carried a basket and was told not to swing it for fear of bursting its cargo of ginger-beer. In those days ginger-beer had big bulgy corks held down with string. In a hot sun, or under stress of too much agitation, the string would break and the corks fly. Then there would be a merry foaming fountain and someone would get reproached.

One of our company had a fishing-rod. He was a young man who, one day, was to be an uncle of mine. But that didn't concern me. What concerned me was the fishing-rod, and presently, perhaps because he felt he must keep in with the family, he let me carry it. To the fisherman born there is nothing so provoking of curiosity as a fishing-rod in a case. Surreptitiously I opened the flap, which contained a small brass spear in a wee pocket, and pulling down the case a little I admired the beauties of the cork butt with its gun-metal ferrule and reel

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rings, and the exquisite frail slenderness of the two top joints.

"It's got two top joints—*two*," I exclaimed, ecstatically.

"Of course," said he. "All good trout rods have two."

I marvelled in silence at what seemed to me then a combination of extravagance and excellent precaution.

There must have been something inherently understanding and noble about that young man who would one day be my uncle, for taking me by the arm he sat me down on a tuft of heather, and took the pieces of rod from the case and fitted them together. The rest of the company moved on and left me in paradise.

It is thirty-five years since that moment and not one detail of it is forgotten. There sounds in my ears to-day as clearly as then the faint, clear pop made by the little cork stoppers with their boxwood tops as they were withdrawn. I remember how, before fitting the pieces together, he rubbed the ferrules against the side of his nose to prevent them sticking. I remember looking up the length of it through a tunnel of sneck rings to the eyelet at the end. Not until he had fixed a reel and passed a line through the rings did he put the lovely pliant thing into my hand. So light it was—so firm—so persuasive—such a thing alive. A sceptre. I could do no more than say "Oo!" and again, "Oo!"

"A thrill, ain't it?" said he.

I had no need to answer that. In my new-found rapture was only one sorrow—the knowledge that such happiness would not endure and that, all too soon, a blank and rodless future awaited me.

"They must be—awfully—awfully 'spensive," I said.

"Couple of guineas," he replied, off-handedly.

A couple of guineas! And we were poor folk, and the future was more rodless than ever.

"Then I shall save and save and save," I said.

And my imagination started to add up twopence a week into guineas. Two hundred and forty pennies to the pound—multiplied by two—four hundred and eighty—and then another twenty-four pennies—five hundred and four. Why, it would take a lifetime—and no sweets, no elastic for catapults, no penny novelty boxes or air-gun bullets or ices or anything.

Tragedy must have been writ large upon my face, for he said, suddenly:—

"When's your birthday?"

I was almost ashamed to tell him how soon it was. Perhaps he, too, was a little taken aback by its proximity, for that future uncle of mine was not as rich as uncles should be.

"We must see about it."

"But it wouldn't—it couldn't be one like that," I said.

I must have touched his pride, for he answered loftily:—

"Certainly it will."

In the fortnight that followed I walked on air and told everybody I had as "good as got a couple of guineas' rod."

NO one can deceive a child, save the child himself, and when my birthday came, and with it a long brown-paper parcel, I knew, even before I had removed the wrappers, that this two-guinea rod was not worth the money. There was a brown linen case, it is true, but it was not a case with a neat compartment for each joint, nor was there a spear in the flap. There was only one top instead of two, and there were no popping little stoppers to protect the ferrules from dust and injury. The lower joint boasted no elegant cork hand-piece, but was a tapered affair coarsely made and rudely varnished. When I fitted the pieces together, what I balanced in my hand was tough and stodgy, rather than limber. The reel, which had come in a different parcel, was of wood. It had neither check nor break, and the line over-ran and back-wound itself with distressing frequency.

I had not read and re-read tackle-makers' price lists without knowing something of rods, and I did not need to look long at this rod before realizing that it was no match to the one I had handled on the Grayshott Road.

I believe at first a great sadness possessed me, but very presently imagination came to the rescue. For I told myself that I had only to think that this was the rod of all other rods that I desired most and it would be so. And it was so.

Furthermore, I told myself that, in this great wide ignorant world, but few people existed with such expert knowledge of rods as I possessed. That I had but to say, "Here is the final word in good rods," and they would accept it as such.

Very confidently I tried the experiment on my mother, with inevitable success. From the depths of her affection and her ignorance on all such matters, she produced:—

"It's a *magnificent* rod."

I went my way knowing full well that she knew not what she said—but that she was kind.

With rather less confidence I approached my father, saying:—

"Look, father! It cost two guineas. It's absolutely the best sort you can get."

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And he, after waggling it a few moments in silence, quoted cryptically :—

"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."

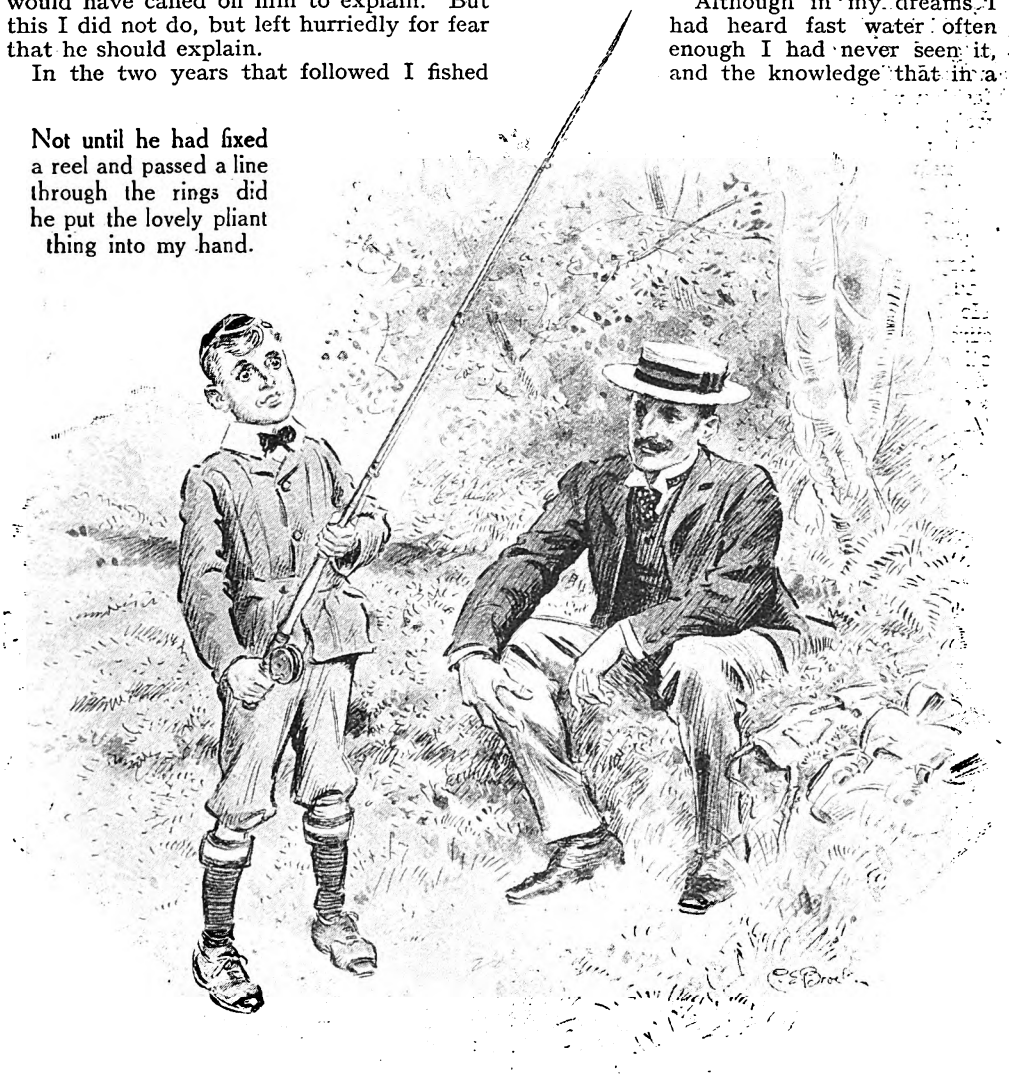
Young as I was, I had some curiosity about words, and on any other occasion I would have called on him to explain. But this I did not do, but left hurriedly for fear that he should explain.

In the two years that followed I fished every day in the slip of a back garden of our tiny London house. And having regard to the fact that this rod was never fashioned to throw a fly, I acquired a pretty knack in the fullness of time and performed some glib casting at the nasturtiums and marigolds that flourished by the back wall.

My parents' fortunes must have been in the ascendant, I suppose, for I call to mind an unforgettable breakfast when my mother told me that father had decided we should spend our summer holiday at a Welsh hotel on the River Lledr. The place was called Pont-y-pant, and she showed me a picture of the hotel with a great knock-me-down river creaming past the front of it.

Although in my dreams I had heard fast water often enough I had never seen it, and the knowledge that in a month's time I should wake with the music of a cataract in my ears was almost more than patience could endure.

In that exquisite, intolerable period of suspense I suffered as only childish longing and enthusiasm can suffer. Even the hank of gut that I bought and bent into innumerable casts failed to alleviate that suffering. I would walk for miles for a moment's delight captured in glueing my nose to the



Not until he had fixed a reel and passed a line through the rings did he put the lovely pliant thing into my hand.

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windows of tackleists' shops in the West-end. I learnt from my grandmother, a wise and calm old lady, how to make nets, and having mastered the art I made myself a landing net. This I set up on a frame fashioned from a penny schoolmaster's cane bound to an old walking-stick. It would be pleasant to record that this was a good and serviceable net—but it was not. It flopped over in a very distressing fashion when called upon to lift the lightest weight. I had to confess to myself that I had more enthusiasm than skill in the manufacture of such articles.

At school there was a boy who had a fishing creel which he swapped with me for a Swedish knife, a copy of "Rogues of the Fiery Cross," and an Easter egg which I had kept on account of its rare beauty. He had forced a hard bargain and was sure he had the best of it, but I knew otherwise.

AT last the great day dawned, and after infinite travel by train we reached our destination as the glow of sunset was greying into dark.

The river was in spate, and as we crossed a tall stone bridge on our way to the hotel I heard it below me, barking and grumbling among great rocks.

I was pretty far gone in tiredness, for I remember little else that night but a rod rack in the hall—a dozen rods of different sorts and sizes—with gaudy salmon flies—some nets—a gaff and an oak coffer upon which lay a freshly caught salmon on a blue ashet.

Then supper by candle-light—bed—darkness—a glitter of stars through the open window—and the ceaseless drumming of water.

By six o'clock next morning I was on the river bank fitting my rod together and watching in awe the great brown ribbon of water go fleetly by.

Among my most treasured possessions were half-a-dozen flies, and two of these I attached to the cast with exquisite care. While so engaged a shadow fell on the grass beside me, and looking up I beheld a lank, shabby individual with a walrus moustache and an unhealthy face, who, the night before, had helped with our luggage at the station.

"Water's too heavy for flies," said he, with an uptilting inflexion. "This evening, yes; now—no—none whateffer. Better try with a worrum in the burrun."

He pointed at a busy little brook which tumbled down the steep hillside and joined the main stream at the garden end.

"C-couldn't I fish with a fly in the—the burrun?" I asked, for although I wanted to catch a fish very badly, for honour's sake I would fain take it on a fly.

"Indeed, no," he replied, slanting the tone of his voice skyward. "You cootn't. Neffer. And that isn't a fly rot whateffer."

"It is," I replied, hotly. "Yes, it is."

But he only shook his head and repeated "No," and took the rod from my hand and illustrated its awkwardness, and handed it back with a wretched laugh.

If he had pitched me into the river I should have been happier.

"It *is* a fly rod and it cost two guineas," I said, and my lower lip trembled.

"Neffer," he repeated. "Five shillings would be too much."

Even a small boy is entitled to some dignity. Picking up my basket I turned without another word and made for the hotel. Perhaps my eyes were blinded with tears, for I was about to plunge into the dark hall when a great rough, kindly voice arrested me with—

"Easy does it."

At the thick end of an immense salmon rod there strode out into the sunlight the noblest figure I had ever seen.

There is no real need to describe my Colonel again—I have done so already—but the temptation is too great. Standing in the doorway, the sixteen-foot rod in hand, the deer-stalker hat besprent with flies crowning his shaggy head, the waders, like seven-league boots, braced up to his armpits—the creel across his shoulder—a gaff across his back—he looked what he was—a god. His eyes met mine with that kind of smile one good man keeps for another.

"An early start," he said. "Any luck, old fellar?"

I told him I hadn't started—not yet.

"Wise chap," said he. "Water's a bit heavy for trouting—it'll soon run down, though. Let's vet those flies of yours."

He took my rod and whipped it expertly.

"A nice piece—new, eh?"

"N-not quite," I stammered, 'but I haven't used it yet, sir—in water."

That god read men's minds.

"I know—garden practice—capital—nothing like it."

Releasing my cast he frowned critically over the flies—a Blue Dun and a March Brown.

"Think so?" he queried. "You don't think it's a shade late in the season for these fancies?"

I said I thought perhaps it was.

"Yes, I think you're right," said he. "I believe in this big water you'd do better with a livelier pattern. Teal and Red—Coch-y-bondhu, Greenwell's Glory."

I said nothing—but nodded gravely at these brave names.

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At the thick end of an immense salmon rod there strode out into the sunlight the noblest figure I had ever seen.

Once more he read my thoughts and saw through the wicker sides of my creel a great emptiness.

"I expect you've fished most in southern rivers. These Welsh trout have a fancy for a spot of colour."

He rummaged in the pocket of his Norfolk jacket and produced a round tin which once had held saddle soap

"Collar on to that," said he; "there's a proper pickle of flies and casts in that tin that, as a keen fisherman, you won't mind sorting out. Still, they may come in useful."

"But, I say, you don't mean——" I began.

"Yes—go on—stick to it—all fishermen are members of the same club and I'm giving the trout a rest for a bit." His eyes ranged the hills and trees opposite. "I

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must be getting on with it before the sun's too high."

Waving his free hand he strode away and presently was lost to view at a bend in the road.

I think my mother was a little piqued by my abstraction during breakfast. My eyes never for an instant deserted the round tin box which lay open beside my plate. Within it was a paradise and a hundred miracles all tangled together in the pleasantest disorder. My mother said something about a lovely walk over the hills, but I had other plans, which included a very glorious hour which should be spent untangling and wrapping up in neat squares of paper my new treasures.

" I suppose he knows best what he wants to do," she said.

So it came about that I was left alone and betook myself to a sheltered spot behind a rock where all the delicious disorder was remedied and I could take stock of what was mine.

I am sure there were at least six casts all set up with flies—and ever so many loose flies, and one great stout tapered cast with a salmon fly upon it that was so rich in splendour that I doubted if my benefactor could really have known that it was there.

I felt almost guilty at owning so much, and not until I had done full justice to everything did I fasten a new cast to my line and go a-fishing.

There is a lot said and written about beginner's luck, but none of it came my way. Indeed, I spent most of the morning extricating my line from the most fearsome tangles. I had no skill in throwing a cast with two droppers upon it, and I found it was an art not to be learnt in a minute. Then, from over-eagerness, I was too snappy with my back-cast, whereby, before many minutes had gone, I heard that warning crack behind me that betokens the loss of a tail fly. I must have spent half an hour searching the meadow for that lost fly and finding it not. Which is not strange, for I wonder has any fisherman ever found that lost fly? The reeds, the buttercups, and the little people with many legs who run in the wet grass conspire together to keep the secret of its hiding-place. I gave up at last, and with a feeling of shame, that was only proper, I invested a new fly on the point of my cast and set to work again, but more warily.

In that hard-racing water a good strain was put upon my rod, and before the morning was out it was creaking at the joints in a way that kept my heart continually in my mouth. It is the duty of a rod to work with a single smooth action, and by no means to divide its performance into three sections of activity. It is a hard task for any angler to persuade his line austerely if his rod behaves thus.

When, at last, my father strolled up the river bank, walking to his shame much nearer the water than a good fisherman should, my nerves were jumpy from apprehension.

" Come along. Food's ready. Done any good ? " said he.

Again it was to his discredit that he put food before sport, but I told him I had had a wonderful morning, and he was glad.

" What do you want to do this afternoon, old man ? " he asked.

" Fish," I said.

" But you can't always fish," he said.

I told him I could, and I was right, and have proved it for thirty years and more.

" Well, well," he said, " please yourself, but isn't it dull not catching anything ? "

And I said as I've said a thousand times since :—

" As if it could be ! "

SO that afternoon I went downstream instead of up, and found myself in difficult country where the river boiled between the narrows of two hills. Stunted oaks overhung the water, and great boulders opposed its flow. Presently I came to a sort of natural flight of steps—a pool and a cascade three times repeated—and there, watching the maniac fury of the waters in awe and wonderment, I saw the most stirring sight in my young life. I saw a silver salmon leap superbly from the cauldron below into the pool above. And I saw another and another salmon do likewise. And I wonder the eyes of me did not fall out of my head.

I cannot say how long I stayed watching that gallant pageant of leaping fish—in ecstasy there is no measurement of time—but at last it came upon me that all the salmon in the sea were careering past me, and that if I were to realize my soul's desire I must hasten to the pool below before the last of them had gone by.

It was a mad adventure, for until I had discovered that stout cast with the gaudy fly attached in the tin box I had given no thought to such noble quarry. My recent possessions had put ideas into my head above my station and beyond my powers. Failure, however, means little to the young, and walking fast, yet gingerly, for fear of breaking my rod top against a tree, I followed the path downstream until I came to a great basin of water into which, through a narrow throat, the river thundered like a storm.

At the head of the pool was a plate of rock scored by the nails of fishermen's boots, and here I sat me down to wait while the

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salmon cast, removed from its wrapper, was allowed to soak and soften in a puddle left by the rain.

And while I waited a salmon rolled not ten yards from where I sat. Head and tail —up and down he went—a great monster of a fish, sporting and deriding me.

With that performance so near at hand, I have often wondered how I was able to control my fingers well enough to tie a figure-eight knot between the line and the cast. But I did, and I'm proud to be able to record it. Your true-born angler does not go blindly to work until he has first satisfied his conscience. There is a pride in knots of which the laity knows nothing, and if, through neglect to tie them rightly, failure and loss should result, pride may not be restored nor conscience salved by the plea of eagerness. With my trembling fingers I bent the knot, and with a pummelling heart launched the line into the broken water at the throat of the pool.

At first the mere tug of the water against that large fly was so thrilling to me that it was hard to believe that I had not hooked a whale. The trembling line swung round in a wide arc into a calm eddy below where I stood. Before casting afresh, I shot a glance over my shoulder to assure myself there was no limb of a tree behind me to foul the fly. And this was a gallant cast, true and straight, with a couple of yards more length than its predecessor and a wider radius. Instinctively I knew, as if the surface had been marked with an X where the salmon had risen, that my fly must pass right over the spot. As it swung by, my nerves were strained like piano wires. I think I knew that something tremendous, impossible, terrifying was going to happen. The sense, the certitude, was so strong in me that I half opened my mouth to shout a warning to the monster "not to." I must have felt very, very young in that moment; I, who that same day had been talked to as a man by a man among men. The years were stripped from me, and I was what I was, ten years old—and appalled.

And then, with the suddenness of a rocket, it happened. The water was cut into a swathe. I remember a silver loop bearing downward—a bright shining, vanishing thing like the bobbin of my mother's sewing machine—and a tug. I shall never forget the viciousness of that tug. I had my fingers tight upon the line, so I got the full force of it. To counteract a tendency to go head-first into the spinning water below I threw myself backwards and sat down on the hard rock with a jar that shut my teeth on my tongue like the jaws of a trap. Luckily I had let the rod go out straight with the line, else it must have snapped in the first frenzy of the downstream rush. Little ass that I was, I tried to check the speeding line with my forefinger, with the result that it cut and burnt me to the bone. There wasn't above twenty yards of line in the reel, and the wretched contrivance was trying to be rid of the line even faster than the fish was wrenching it out. Heaven knows why it didn't snarl, for great loops and whorls were whirling like Catharine-wheels under my wrist. An instant's glance revealed the terrifying fact that there were not more than half-a-dozen yards left on the reel and the fish showed no sign of abating his rush. With the realization of impending and inevitable catastrophe upon me, I launched a yell for help which, rising above the roar of the waters, went echoing down the gorge.

And then, to add to my terrors, the salmon leapt—a swinging leap like a silver arch appearing and instantly disappearing upon the broken surface. So mighty, so all-powerful he seemed in that sublime moment that I lost all sense of reason and raised the rod with a sudden jerk above my head.

I have often wondered, had the rod actually been the "two-guinea" rod my imagination claimed for it, whether it could have withstood the strain thus violently and unreasonably imposed upon it. The wretched thing that I held so grimly never even put up a fight. It snapped at the ferrule of the lower joint and plunged like a toboggan down the slanting line to vanish into the black depths of the water.

My horror at this calamity was so profound that I was lost even to the consciousness that the last of my line had run out. A couple of vicious tugs advised me of this awful truth. Then, snap! The line parted at the reel, flickered out through the rings, and was gone. I was left with nothing but the butt of a broken rod in my hand and an agony of mind that even now I cannot recall without emotion.

I am not ashamed to confess that I cried. I lay down on the rock with my cheek in the puddle where I had soaked the cast, and plenished it with my tears. For what had the future left for me but a cut and burning finger, a badly bumped behind, the single joint of a broken rod, and no faith in uncles? How long I lay there weeping I do not know. Ages, perhaps—or minutes—or seconds. I was roused by a rough hand on my shoulder and a kindly voice demanding:—

"Hurt yourself, Ike Walton?"

Blinking away my tears, I pointed at my broken rod with a bleeding forefinger.

"Come! This is bad luck," said my

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Colonel, his face grave as a stone. "How did it happen?"

"I c-caught a s-salmon."

"You what?" said he.

"I d-did," I said.

He looked at me long and earnestly; then, taking my injured hand, he looked at that and nodded.

"The poor groundlings who can find no better use for a river than something to put a bridge over think all fishermen are liars," said he. "But we know better, eh? By the bumps and breaks and cuts I'd say you made a plucky fight against heavy odds. Let's hear all about it."

So with his arm round my shoulders and his great shaggy head near to mine I told him all about it.

At the end he gave me a mighty and comforting squeeze, and he said:—

"The loss of one's first big fish is the heaviest loss I know. One feels whatever happens one'll never——"

He stopped and pointed dramatically.

"There it goes—see! Down there at the tail of the pool."

In the broken water where the pool emptied itself into the shallows beyond I saw the top joints of my rod dancing on the surface.

"Come on," he shouted, and gripping my hand jerked me to my feet. "Scatter your legs. There's just a chance."

Dragging me after him, he raced along by the river path to the end of the pool, where, on a narrow promontory of grass, his enormous salmon rod was lying.

"Now," he said, picking it up and making the line whistle to and fro in the air with sublime authority, "keep your eyes skinned on those shallows for another glimpse of it."

A second later I was shouting:—

"There—there!"

He must have seen the rod-point at the same moment, for his line flowed out and the big fly hit the water with a plop not a couple of feet from the spot.

He let it ride on the current, playing it with a sensitive touch like the brush-work of an artist.

"Half a jiffy!" he exclaimed at last. "Wait! Yes, I think so. Cut down to that rock and see if I haven't fished up the line."

I needed no second invitation, and presently was yelling:—

"Yes—yes, you have."

"Stretch yourself out, then, and collar hold of it."

With the most exquisite care he navigated the line to where I lay stretched upon the rock. Then—

"Right you are—good lad—I'm coming down."

Considering his age he leapt the rocks like a chamois.

"Now," he said, and took the wet line delicately between his forefinger and thumb.

One end trailed limply downstream, but the other end seemed anchored in the big pool where I had had my unequal and disastrous contest.

Looking into his face I saw a sudden light of excitement dancing in his eyes.

"Odd," he muttered, "but not impossible."

"What isn't?" I asked, breathlessly.

"Well, it looks to me as if the top joints of that rod of yours have gone downstream."

Gingerly he pulled up the line and presently an end with a broken knot appeared.

"The reel knot, eh?"

I nodded gloomily.

"Then we lose the rod," said he.

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That wasn't very heartening news.

"On the other hand, it's just possible the fish is still on—sulking."

"Oo!" I exclaimed.

"Now, steady does it," he warned, "and give me my rod."

Taking a pair of clippers from his pocket he cut his own line just above the cast.

"Can you tie a knot?" he asked.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Come on, then, bend your line on to mine. Quick as lightning."

Under his critical eye I joined the two lines with a blood-knot.

"I guessed you were a fisherman," he said, nodded approvingly, and clipped off the ends. "And now to know the best or the worst."

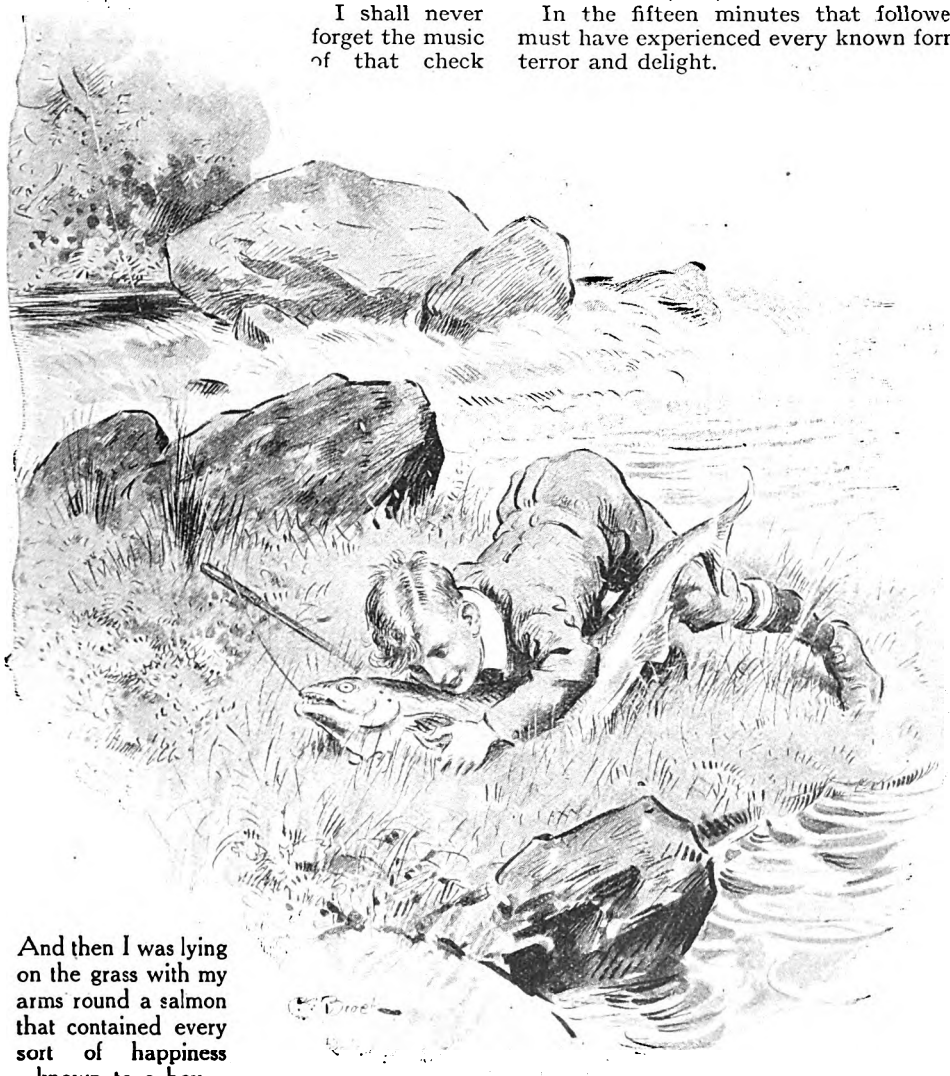
I shall never forget the music of that check reel, nor the suspense with which I watched, as with the butt of the rod bearing against the hollow of his thigh he steadily wound up the wet slack line. Every instant I expected it to come drifting downstream—but it didn't. Presently it rose in a tight slant from the pool above.

"Snagged, I'm afraid," he said, and worked the rod with an easy straining motion to and fro. "Yes, I'm afraid—no, by Lord Bobs, he's on."

I think it was only right and proper that I should have launched a yell of triumph, as with the spoken word the point at which the line cut the water shifted magically from the left side of the pool to the right.

"*And* a fish, too," said he.

In the fifteen minutes that followed I must have experienced every known form of terror and delight.



And then I was lying on the grass with my arms round a salmon that contained every sort of happiness known to a boy.

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" Youngster," said he, " you should be doing this by rights, but I'm afraid the rod's a bit above your weight."

" Oh, go on and catch him," I pleaded.

" And so I will," he promised; " unship the gaff, young 'un, and stand by to use it, and if you break the cast we'll never speak to each other again, and that's a bet."

But I didn't break the cast. The noble, courageous, indomitable example of my river god had lent me skill and precision beyond my years. When at long last a weary, beaten silver monster rolled within reach of my arm into a shallow eddy the steel gaff shot out fair and true and sank home.

And then I was lying on the grass with my arms round a salmon that weighed twenty-two pounds on the scale and contained every sort of happiness known to a boy.

And best of all, my river god shook hands with me and called me " partner."

That evening the salmon was placed upon the blue ashet in the hall bearing a little card with its weight and my name upon it.

And I am afraid I sat on a chair facing it for ever so long, so that I could hear what the other anglers had to say as they passed by.

I was sitting there when my Colonel put his head out of his private sitting-room and beckoned me to come in.

" A true fisherman lives in the future, not the past, old man," said he, " though, for this once, it 'ud be a shame to reproach you."

I suppose I coloured guiltily—at any rate, I hope so.

" We got the fish," said he, " but we lost the rod, and the future without a rod doesn't bear thinking of. Now——" and he pointed at a long wooden box on the floor that overflowed with rods of different sorts and sizes, " rummage among those—take your time and see if you can find anything to suit you."

" But do you mean—can I——"

" We're partners, aren't we? And p'r'aps as such you'd rather we went through our stock together."

" Oo, sir," I said.

" Here, quit that," he ordered, gruffly. " By Lord Bobs! if a show like this afternoon's don't deserve a medal, what does? Now, here's a handy piece by Hardy—a light and useful tool—or if you fancy greenheart in preference to split bamboo——"

I have the rod to this day—and I count it among my dearest treasures. And to this day I have a flick of the wrist that was his legacy. I have, too, some small skill in dressing flies, the elements of which were learnt in his company by candle-light after the day's work was over. And I have countless memories of that month-long, month-short friendship—the closest and most perfect friendship perhaps of all my life.

He came to the station and saw me off. How I vividly remember his shaggy head at the window, with the whiskered cheeks and the gunpowder marks at the corners of his eyes. I didn't cry, although I wanted to awfully. We were partners and shook hands. I never saw him again, although on my birthdays I would have coloured cards from him with Irish-Scotch-Norwegian postmarks. Very brief they were, " Water very low." " Took a good fish last Thursday." " Been prawning, but don't like it."

Sometimes at Christmas I had gifts—a reel—a tapered line—a fly-book. But I never saw him again.

CAME at last no more postcards or gifts, but in *The Fishing Gazette*, of which I was a religious reader, was an obituary telling how one of the last of the Mutiny veterans had joined the great majority. Quite a short affair it was—almost as brief as those cards he used to send me. It seems he had been fishing half an hour before he died. He had taken his rod down and passed out. They had buried him at Totnes, overlooking the River Dart.

So he was no more—my river god—and what was left of him they had put into a box and buried it in the earth.

But that isn't true—nor is it true that I never saw him again. For I seldom go a-fishing but that I meet him on the river banks.

The banks of a river are frequented by a strange company and are full of mysterious and murmurous sounds—the cluck and laughter of water, the piping of birds, the hum of insects, and the whispering of wind in the willows. What should prevent a man in such a place having word and speech with another who is not there? So much of fishing lies in imagination—and mine needs little stretching to give my river god a living form.

" With this ripple," says he, " you should do well."

" And what's it to be? " say I. " Blue Upright—Red Spinner? What's your fancy, sir? "

Spirits never grow old. He has begun to take an interest in dry-fly methods, that river god of mine with his seven-league boots, his shaggy head, and the gaff across his back.

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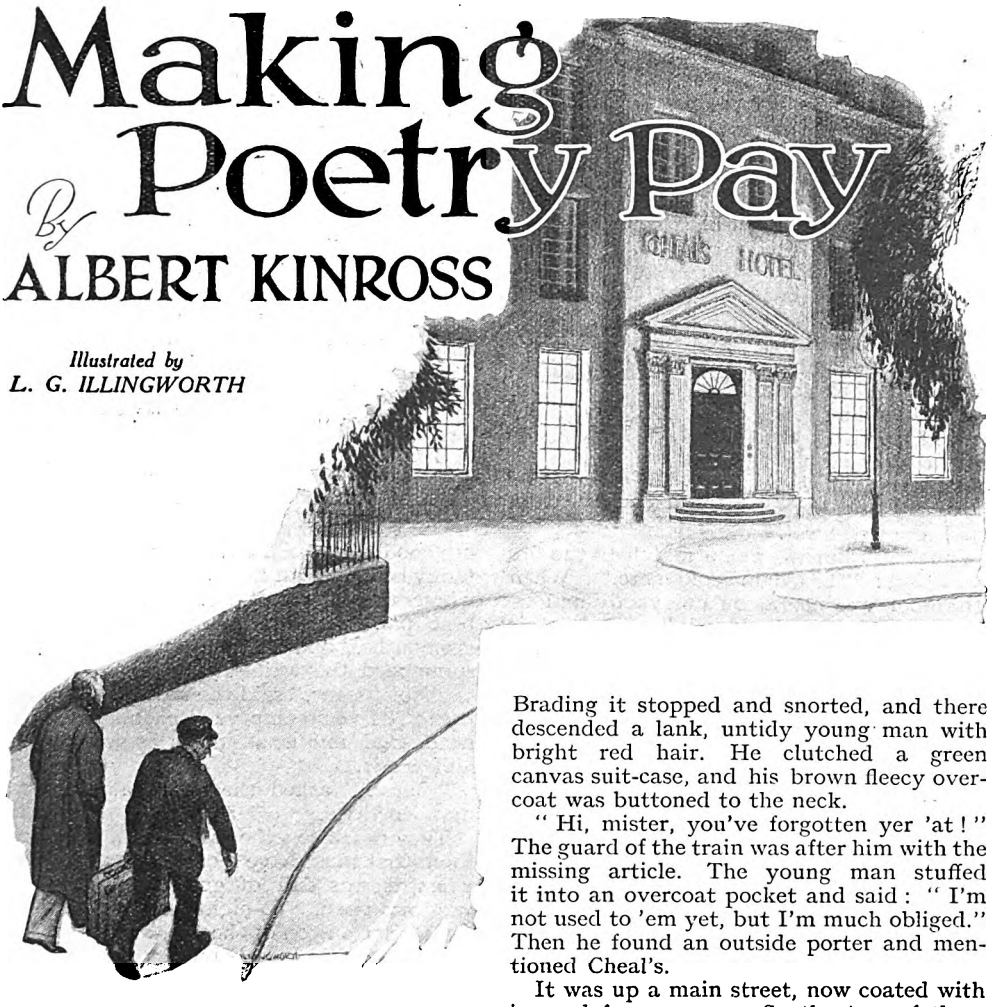
Making Poetry Pay

By ALBERT KINROSS

Illustrated by
L. G. ILLINGWORTH



CHEAL'S HOTEL, at Brading, in the Isle of Wight, is everything that a hotel should be. There are forty-seven bedrooms, a couple of bathrooms to each floor, with constant hot water; and the meals are rich and plentiful, the prices moderate, the service friendly and obliging. So, if you are in doubt as to where to spend a summer holiday, or merely wish to explore a sunkist and historic island, then go to Cheal's. But Cheal's in winter is a different story.

The boat that connects the island with the rest of the civilized world had faced a blizzard and landed its score of passengers, and these had scrambled into the little train which meets one at the pier and then perambulates. It runs about the island and sheds passengers or takes them in. At Brading it stopped and snorted, and there descended a lank, untidy young man with bright red hair. He clutched a green canvas suit-case, and his brown fleecy overcoat was buttoned to the neck.

"Hi, mister, you've forgotten yer 'at!" The guard of the train was after him with the missing article. The young man stuffed it into an overcoat pocket and said: "I'm not used to 'em yet, but I'm much obliged." Then he found an outside porter and mentioned Cheal's.

It was up a main street, now coated with ice and frozen snow. So the two of them slipped and slithered, and the porter, who was growing elderly, puffed and panted and changed the suit-case from his right hand to his left.

"Never been here before, sir?" he asked.

"Never," said the young man; "I'll bring my skates with me next time, or a pair of wings."

The exterior of Cheal's looked promising. It was an old Georgian house, well lit up, and when you rang the bell a waiter appeared, and a boots, and a handsome lady with tinted hair, and a chambermaid lurked in the background, and a flapper sat at a desk behind the office window. The red-headed young man paid the porter and gave his name. "I asked you to reserve a room for me," he said.

"Take the gentleman's bag up to number seventeen," replied the manageress, and

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led the way to a large flat book in which people registered.

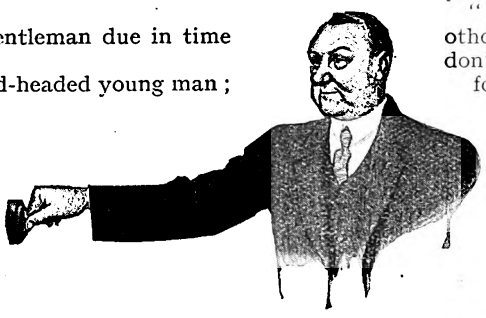
The red-headed young man discovered that he had the whole of Cheal's Hotel to himself.

"I asked you to reserve a room and you've reserved a whole hotel," he remarked, with a grin.

"There's another gentleman due in time for dinner."

"Good," said the red-headed young man; and then went upstairs, where he picked himself out the best bedroom on the first floor, and the chambermaid tried to look serious and the boots opened the suit-case, and another young lady brought hot water, and the red-headed young man himself put a match to the fire and said: "It's dam' cold here." When the door was closed on everybody and he was alone in Cheal's Hotel, he stood on his red head, clapped his heels together, and turned a somersault upon the floor.

"This is excellent," he said. "Dot never told me. Cheal's Hotel—I thought it was a pub."



A large, bulbous man entered, touched the bell, and called for a gin and vermouth.

IN the smoking-room below he found a bright fire, lots of electric light, and a pile of *Prattlers*. They seemed to be exactly the same *Prattlers* that he had seen last year and the year before, with snapshots of the same fat-headed men and women on the same golf-links, the same Society hostesses adorning the front page, and the same leggy pictures of ravishing young women.

A large, bulbous man entered, touched the bell, and, when the waiter appeared, called for a gin and vermouth, and, turning to the red-headed young man, "What's yours?" he added.

"The same," said the red-headed young man.

"Have a gasper?" inquired the newcomer, and lit one himself.

The red-headed young man had a gasper, the waiter brought the drinks, the other paid and told him to keep the change. "Here's how!" he said. "Rum place this in winter. But *safe*"; and he looked round, as though he had eluded the police, Scotland Yard, and the entire Criminal Investigation Department put together. He sighed heavily and deeply.

"My wife's a good woman," he said, "but one can have too much of her. I've hopped it till she's finished talking. Are you married?"

"No," said the red-headed young man.

"Then you won't understand."

"Me! It's my business to understand. But I'm engaged," and the red-headed young man smiled.

"Drop it," said the other, "cut it out! You don't know what you're in for. No one ever does."

"Have another?" said the red-headed young man.

They had another, and by the time the large, bulbous man had swallowed it, things were looking more rosy.

"Mind, I don't say that all women are alike," he announced, "but my good lady's a bit trying at times. It's funny how one can talk to a perfect stranger where one wouldn't say a word to one's best pal. No, not after three gins and vermouths," and he rang the bell and again summoned the waiter.

"Not for me," said the red-headed young man; "I've an empty stomach and a weak head, and my usual drink is lemon-juice and water."

"Sure?" asked the other, and ordered number three.

They dined together after that, in a large room that must have looked well in summer when it was full of guests and had the windows open. To-night the pair of them almost sat on top of the fire, and so did the waiter when he wasn't busy.

"Not much doin' this time o' year," he said, "but we get a few commercial gentlemen. They're all off by Friday night, and of course the Island's only an island."

"Thank God for that!" said the large gentleman, who by now had revealed himself as a Mr. Harrower.

"Harry, you've had too much to drink," said the red-headed young man, pensively.

"Now, that's what my wife says, an' I've come here to escape from her; an' if *you* begin——"

"It's out of the frying-pan into the fire," said the waiter.

"Thank God, there's a fire!" cried the red-headed young man; at which they all three laughed.

After dinner the two guests sat together in the cosy smoke-room. The waiter had taken their order, the boots had departed to the picture palace, the flapper and the manageress were busy in the bar. They

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had Cheal's Hotel to themselves and made the most of it, and, besides, it was the hour of confidences and understanding.

"I'm engaged," the red-headed young man had again announced; "the lady's name is Dot Belton, and she says, and quite rightly, that I've got to meet her Pa and Ma. They live here in the Island, Dot lives in London, and I live in Kent with my Aunt Caroline. To-morrow morning I've got to go through it."

"All very well and proper; but if you'll take my advice——"

"I never have done, and I'm not going to begin now," said the red-headed young man.

"Well, we all have to learn—by bitter experience," sighed Mr. Harrower. "I was like that myself."

"And you'll be like it again," said the red-headed young man, "and if it ain't wives, it'll be something sharper. Got any children?"

"My hat, I'd forgot about them!" said Mr. Harrower, abruptly. "Anyhow, they'll keep till Monday, an' so will business and all the other trouble. I've got a garriage when I'm at home. Doin' well—doin' extra well."

The red-headed young man reflected. He reflected hard.

"What's a garriage?" he asked at last.

"You spell it g-a-r-a-g-e," said Mr. Harrower, "but you pronounce it garriage. An' now, if it's not a rude question, what's your job?"

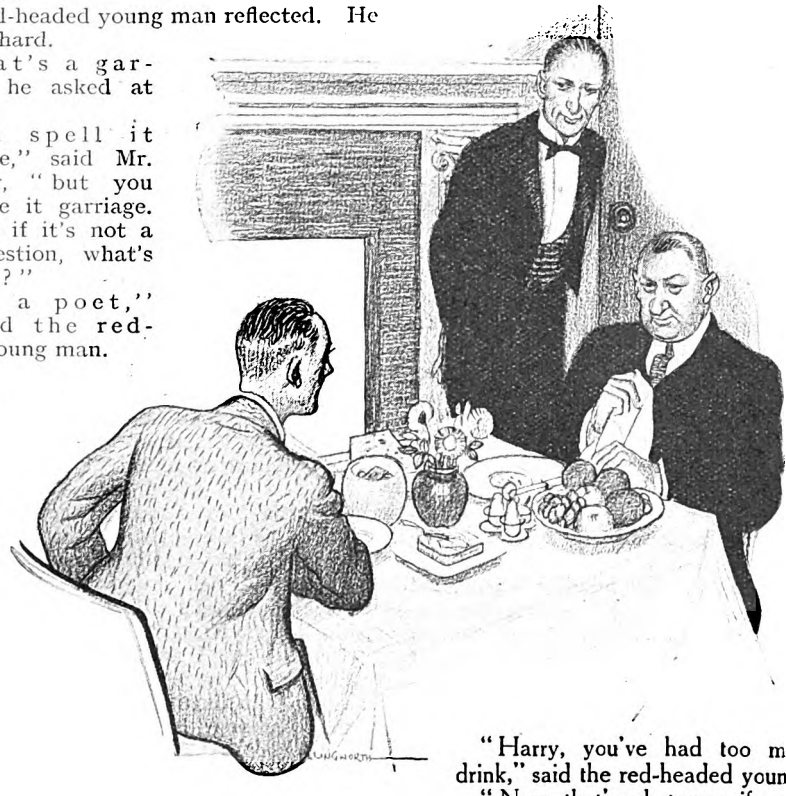
"I'm a poet," announced the red-headed young man.

"Good God!" said Mr. Harrower. "I've read about 'em, but I didn't know there were any."

"There won't be after I'm married," observed the red-headed young man, with a look of mild resignation crinkling his freckled face. "Now, what do you think of this?" and the poet placed himself on the hearthrug in front of the fireplace, and in a voice smouldering with emotion declaimed:—

"I have forgotten laughter since you came near;
You laid your hand on my heart, and its merriness was over;
You gave me a passion that burns and will burn for ever;
You laid your hand on my heart, and I am changed.

"I can only remember the dark cloud of your hair,
The dark lights of your eyes, and your shadow'd face;



"Harry, you've had too much to drink," said the red-headed young man.

"Now, that's what my wife says, an' I've come here to escape from her; an' if *you* begin——"

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I can only remember you drained my
youth away,
And gave me manhood with your flower-
soft lips.

" And beyond you there is neither loving
nor dreaming ;
You hold the world, and sorrow and toil
and rest—
You have taken my youth and my
laughter,
All things of pleasant seeming,
And lighted a torch of battle within my
breast."

The red-headed young man had finished. " Now, who wrote that ? " he asked, proudly.

" Shakespeare ? " ventured Mr. Harrower.

" No ; I did ! "

" Same thing. All poets come alike to me ; but my wife—that's where we differ."

" I'd like to meet your wife," said the red-headed young man.

" Did you write that about Dot—I've forgotten her other name—Miss Dot-an'-carry-one, we'll call her ? "

" No," said the red-headed young man ; " I wrote that about another girl, and—alas !—she chucked me overboard."

" I'm not surprised," said Mr. Harrower ; " an' if you'll take my advice——"

The red-headed young man grinned. " Well, what is it ? "

" I'd cut out poetry an' do a job of honest work ; or you'll cop it a second time, an' I won't blame her. An' as for her Pa and Ma, if a young man was to come to me an' say he was a poet——" Here words failed Mr. Harrower and he gave it up. " But my wife likes that kind o' thing—gets on my nerves," he ended.

" I apologize," said the red-headed young man ; " but it was you who asked me, wasn't it ? "

" Well, if I was you, I wouldn't tell her Pa and Ma. I'd keep it dark an' look for something honest. You've got money, or else you wouldn't be staying here, I suppose ? " and Mr. Harrower regarded the poet suspiciously.

" Simply rolling," laughed the red-headed young man.

" Well, you didn't make it out o' poetry, I'll be bound ! An' now, what about another drink and bed ? "

They had another drink, and " Here's luck," hiccupped Mr. Harrower ; " but if I was you, I wouldn't tell 'em. Say you got a garriage—I'll back you up. Say anything ! "

Thus adjured, advised, and comforted, the red-headed young man sought the best bedroom on the first floor, where his fire was still burning, and the same attentive hands had placed two stone hot-water bottles in his bed and wrapped them round with his pyjamas. " Poor old Harrower," he said ; " I bet he wishes he were safe at home, wife or no wife ! " For the poet had escorted his new-found friend to a room that felt like a refrigerator and hadn't even a photograph of Miss Dot Belton stuck up on a dressing-table, whence she smiled at her adorer out of a silver frame.

The red-headed young man slept, and, possibly, he dreamt, and next morning he was up betimes and had read the paper and sent off a long and expensive telegram before he met Dot Belton by appointment in the High Street ; and from then onward he was lost to Cheal's Hotel and was, presumably, having it out with Pa and Ma.

THE hotel had closed for the night when he returned. The clock of St. Martin's Church had struck eleven and most of Brading and the Island had gone to bed. And he was not alone, for the boots, who answered the bell, found him standing on the doorstep with a remarkably handsome woman wrapped in furs.

" Is Mr. Harrower up ? " asked the red-headed young man.

" Yes, up and doing," said the boots. " That's him," as a rich and fruity baritone floated in from the lounge, and you could catch every word quite distinctly :—

" Wot's all this I hear
About the Prince of Wales ?
He goes off to Paris
With his pal Ned Harris
An' dines off a bucket o' snails.

" An' when he's got 'em down,
He says to all the Town,
' Try snails. It never fails.
Keeps me fit—
Don't mention it—
Hard as nails ! ' "

" That's him singing," said the boots ; " fine voice he's got, too."

" Yes," said the lady in furs.

The red-headed young man grinned.

" He's giving us all a party, an' he's been askin' after you, sir."

" Well, here I am," and the red-headed young man handed the boots a dressing-case, and at the same time added : " Will you please show this lady up to Mr. Harrower's room ? And light the fire if there isn't one."

" I'll attend to that," said the lady ; " I'll be down in a minute or two," and, accompanied by the mystified yet respectful boots, she departed up the stairway.

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The red-headed young man waited. He waited for Mr. Harrower to finish his song before he joined the party. It was in full swing behind the glass-panelled doors that led from the lounge to the drawing-room, and you could see it going strong.

There were the manageress and the flapper, both very smart, and the two chambermaids and the stillroom-maid, all out of their uniforms and dressed up fit to kill, and an expert in a brown suit at the piano, in whom the poet recognized the waiter.

The song had ended, and even the chorus. The red-headed young man walked in.

"We been waiting for you," said Mr. Harrower. "We thought it'd cheer you up. You'd want some cheerin' after spending the day with her Pa and Ma."

"Encore!" cried the waiter, upon whom the real purport of these last remarks was lost. "Won't you sing us another song, Mr. Harrower?"

The manageress seconded this motion and Mr. Harrower was perfectly willing to oblige.

"It's from the same comic opera, 'Isabel,'" he announced, "and you'll all join in the chorus, please, an' you too, Ginger."

The red-headed young man agreed.

Then Mr. Harrower began again:—

"You can't do with 'em,
An' you can't do without 'em;
I've done my best to flout 'em;
But when you're badly smitten
You feel just like a kitten,
An' over goes the show!"

MR. HARROWER, immensely popular, was in the middle of a third and no less vigorous effort when the handsome lady, who had put away her furs, joined the party. She was standing, watchful and very much amused, in the doorway, and, as the chorus was in full blast, no one took any particular notice of her till it was ended.

"Now, then, all together!" Mr. Harrower had shouted; and all together they were singing:—

"As I sit in my bath,
I bellow like a calf;
It makes the neighbours laugh.
I sing 'em songs about their wrongs—
What-'o! Not 'arf!"

"Ginger, you're singin' out o' tune," cried Mr. Harrower, in the pause which followed on this climax; and then, suddenly catching sight of the lady in the doorway, his mouth opened wide and stayed open, his eyes nearly popped out of their sockets, while a light yet visible perspiration began to trickle down his lofty brow. And next, "Annie!" he cried; and for a moment it looked as though Mr. Harrower was about to scatter.

"It's all right, Frank," replied the lady, "I'm not so alarming, am I?"

"No, you're a doocid good-looking woman," said Mr. Harrower, "an' well you know it!" He turned on the poet suspiciously and as though to do him a violence, but, on second thoughts, he merely turned.

"I said I'd like to meet your wife," the red-headed young man was explaining, "so I sent her a telegram this morning—thought she might be anxious about you—got your address out of the hotel book—and here we all are. She and Dot and Pa and Ma and I have been having a pleasant evening. That's right, isn't it, Mrs. Harrower? And all is forgiven."

"And forgotten," said Mrs. Harrower.

"Sure?" asked Mr. Harrower.

The rest of the company, led by the manageress, in the face of these intimate revelations, was trickling away like snow before an April sun.

"Sure," said Mrs. Harrower; and then, with a charming smile: "Frank, old boy, with all your faults, you're a man. And I like men," she ended, ravishingly. "And now you'll sing one for me? My favourite?"

Mr. Harrower, much relieved, needed no second bidding. He stationed himself again at the piano and Mrs. Harrower took the stool that had been vacated by the waiter. The red-headed young man listened:—

"As I strolled down a country lane,
I met the lass who's now my Jane;
Her eyes were dark and dark her hair,
And she was brown from there to there,
And her lips were sweet as honey.
We hadn't any money.
But what cared she and what cared I
A-dreaming under that blue sky?"

And when it was over: "Look here," said Mr. Harrower, "that's the stuff you ought to write—*not poetry!*"

"But I wrote it," said the red-headed young man, "and I wrote the others—every one of them."

"Why, they're songs—an' you said you were a poet."

The red-headed young man and Mrs. Harrower exchanged a smile.

"They're *songs*, I tell you!" cried Mr. Harrower; and then, as he saw it all as if by limelight: "No wonder her Pa and Ma jumped at you!"

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ANIMAL GROTESQUES

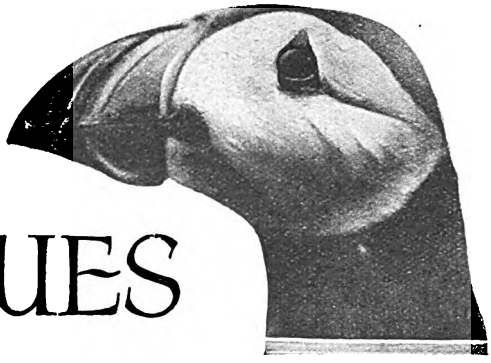

Photo: King.

The Puffin.

By

PROFESSOR J. ARTHUR THOMSON

M.A., LL.D.

THERE are museums and shows where the curious can see monstrosities such as two-headed calves, six-legged lambs, quadruped chickens, bull-headed trout, and the queerest of gold-fishes. But all such things are transient; they are contradictions in terms, discords in development that cannot last. If they crop up, as two-headed trout fry do in wild nature, they are speedily cut off. Nature abhors disharmony even more than a vacuum. Sometimes, indeed, one comes across a full-grown rabbit with front teeth growing out like elephant's tusks. This is a monstrosity due to some accident or slight lack of symmetry which prevents the usual neat meeting of the upper and lower incisors. If the lower incisors fail to meet the upper ones there is nothing to wear away their chisel edges, and, being rootless, they go on growing until the rabbit is unable to eat at all. But it is remarkable how long a rabbit can survive though unable to bite the herbage in the orthodox way. Normally, of course, the persistent growth of a rodent's rootless front teeth is all to the good, for it compensates for the wear and tear at the cutting edge; it is but rarely that some slight disturbance turns great advantage into a serious disadvantage.

Apart from these occasional perturbations, however, there are normally quaint wild animals which have features so unexpected that we can hardly look at them without a smile. They are whimsical rather than ugly; and most artists, who are the authorities on beauty, gloat over them. Perhaps we may call them "grotesques."

One of the most attractive of grotesques is the little sea-horse or Hippocampus, which is not uncommon in shallow water in the Mediterranean in places where seaweeds grow abundantly. It has been compared to a knight on the chessboard, mounted on the dainty coiled shell of a little cuttle-fish called spirula. Its head is slightly suggestive of a horse's, and its tail is prehensile like a monkey's. On the middle of the back there is a rapidly vibrating fan-like fin. The head bears tiny unclosing eyes, which are focused one after another, not simultaneously. The mouth is very different from a horse's, for it has no teeth; it seems to suck up minute crustaceans and the like as if it were a pipette. Near the beginning of the tail the male sea-horse has a skin pocket into which the female inserts some eggs and then some more. The father carries them about until they hatch, and then he expels the young fry, which are about half an inch long. One never tires watching the sea-horse's movements. A favourite pose is to sit bolt upright with the tail curled round a frond of seaweed. Then, as if on a hinge, the body swings forward. The tail is loosened and the fish moves prettily, using the median dorsal fin, which vibrates rapidly, and also its delicate fore-fins, which correspond to our arms. It sinks or tumbles forward in the water, recovers itself, and begins again. The Australian sea-horse, Phyllopteryx, is so covered with tassels of skin that it looks like a much-divided seaweed frond. At least, it is liker that than anything else. It is an extraordinary grotesque.

It must have been with a twinkle in her eye, so to speak, that Nature evolved a chameleon out of a lizard. Was there ever

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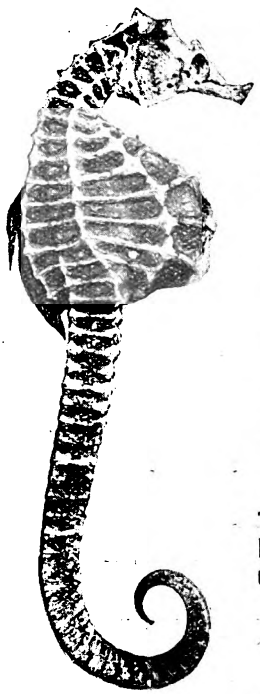

The sea-horse has been compared to the knight on the chessboard.

a quainter animal, with its laterally compressed head, its long tail coiled like a watch-spring, a body that can be made smaller and again larger, a tongue sticky with insect-lime and sometimes six inches long, which it can shoot out, its split hands and feet, which are thus better able to grip the branches, its quaint independently-moving eyes closed in by lids grown together so that only a pinhole opening is left, its granulated skin with an extraordinary repertory of quick colour-changes? Most animals are bundles of adaptations, but a chameleon is a whole bag of tricks. It puffs itself up, it contracts itself down, it sways from side to side, it moves so stealthily that one can hardly believe that it has shifted its position; it gapes angrily and displays the sometimes luridly-coloured cavern of its mouth; it bluffs at one time, and puts on a cloak of invisibility at another; it poses as if frozen and then catapults out its tongue on an unfortunate insect several inches away. It is interesting that in animals so far apart as sea-horse and chameleon there should be the same independent focusing of the two eyes and the same up and down, instead of sideways, movement of the prehensile tail. When people call a chameleon "ugly" they are victims of an affectation; the creature is an artistic harmony; it is like a living gargoyle. There are many different kinds and they are all grotesques.

Flying birds are such artistic creatures that we can hardly think of any of them as grotesque. The fact is that a flying bird cannot well be freakish on a big scale, for this would endanger the capacity for flight. On a small scale, however, there may be grotesque extravagances, such as the capacious pouch of the pelican, the long legs of the flamingo, and the gape of the goat-sucker. It is difficult to look at a puffin without feeling more cheerful—for one is tickled by the large, brightly-coloured, laterally compressed bill, whose scaling is partly moulted at the end of summer, and leaves the bird with a smaller and much more conventional bill for the winter months, mostly spent on the open sea. There is also something quaint in the alert, upright pose of the puffin as it sits at the mouth of its burrow, as if it were sitting on its tail, which, of course, it isn't. The flightless penguin, with its flipper-like wings and upright attitude, also approaches the

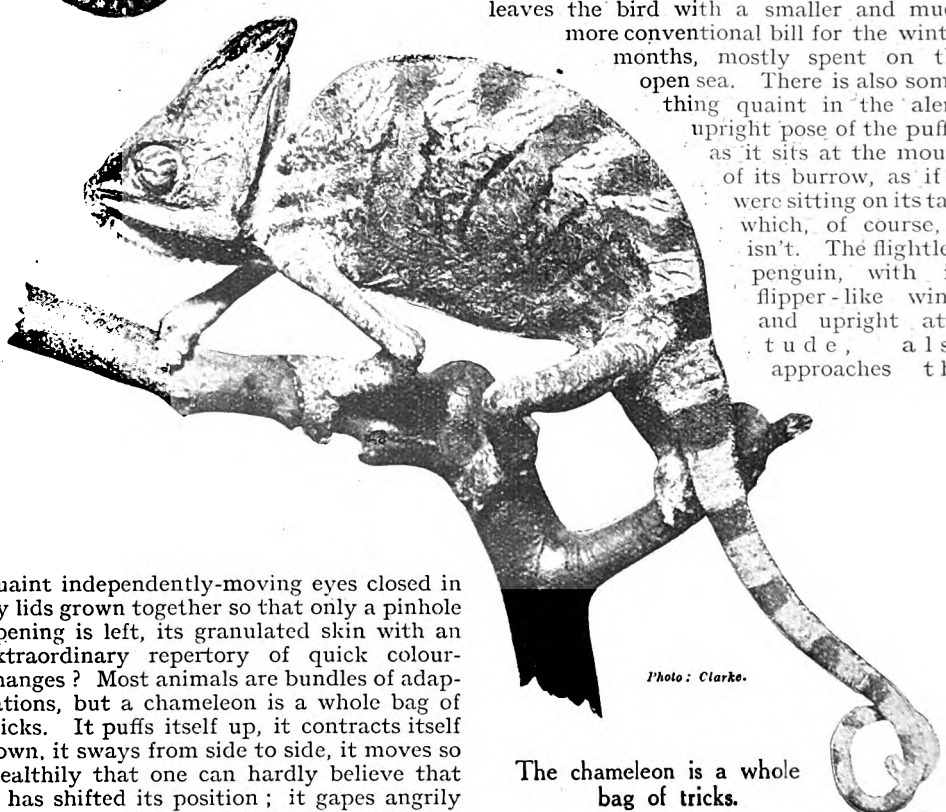

Photo: Clarke.

The chameleon is a whole bag of tricks.

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grotesque. The exaggeratedly wattled turkey-cock, suggestive of exuberant masculinity, sometimes seems a little ridiculous, as the popular epithet "Bubbly-Jock" indicates; yet on the whole he carries his idiosyncrasies with dignity.

But there is one case where for a season the term grotesque seems justified even in this æsthetic class; and that is in the courting male frigate-bird. For he has scarlet air-sacs on his neck which he can inflate till they form a double balloon almost as large as the whole body. With his head resting on this huge pillow he castanets with his bill to his desired mate. Fortunately he does not know how grotesque he looks. Perhaps he would say the same of us.

There is a way of making a grotesque that is hardly fair, and that is by photographing *part* of an animal. Thus the front view of a big manatee is almost indescribable. In spite of our convictions, the word "monstrous" suggests itself. The adult has no front teeth, but the front portions of the jaws are covered with horny plates; the upper lip is swollen and deeply notched in the middle; the nostrils have crescent-shaped valved openings; the small eyes are surrounded by radiating crow's feet; all the lip region is heavily moustached. Much the same may be said of the manatee's first cousin, the dugong; a front view photograph is like a nightmare. But we must see life whole, and when we envisage the entire twelve-foot body of the manatee, somewhat porpoise-like in outline, the suggestion of monstrosity disappears. The creature is an artistic unity—much more so than a prize pig, for whose disproportions Man, not Nature, is to blame. It is interesting to notice that the dugong and the manatee, called sea-cows by some, are called mermaids by others. So much depends on the point of view.

If we had not become accustomed to bats, we would see that they are beginning to approach the grotesque. There is something daring in stretching out a mammal's skin between the fingers to make a wing, and continuing it down the sides of the body to the feet, and on to the tail if there is one. Yet the whole contrivance is so well adapted for flight that we lose sight of the grotesqueness, though there is more than a hint of this in the extraordinary nose-leaves and ear-leaves that many bats show, or even in the elongation of the ear-trumpets of the common long-eared bat, in which they are almost the length of the whole body. Even the donkey's long left ear, of which Wordsworth tried to make poetry, is a poor affair in comparison. There is more than a hint of the grotesque in the hibernating bat which hangs itself up by its toes and wraps itself up in its arms!

The idea of the grotesque among animals implies something out of proportion, something unduly exaggerated, and a good example of this is the quaint fish called the angler or fishing frog. It suffers in a very literal way from swelled head, for at a certain stage in its development there is an extraordinary broadening out of the fore part of the body, with which the hinder part does not keep pace. The angler often lies sluggishly on the floor of the sea, sometimes half-covered in sand, the whole front of the body occupied with a mouth enormously widened sideways, the jaws beset with sinister inward-bending hinged teeth that make entrance easy, but exit impossible. The angler feeds largely on fishes, which are probably intrigued by a

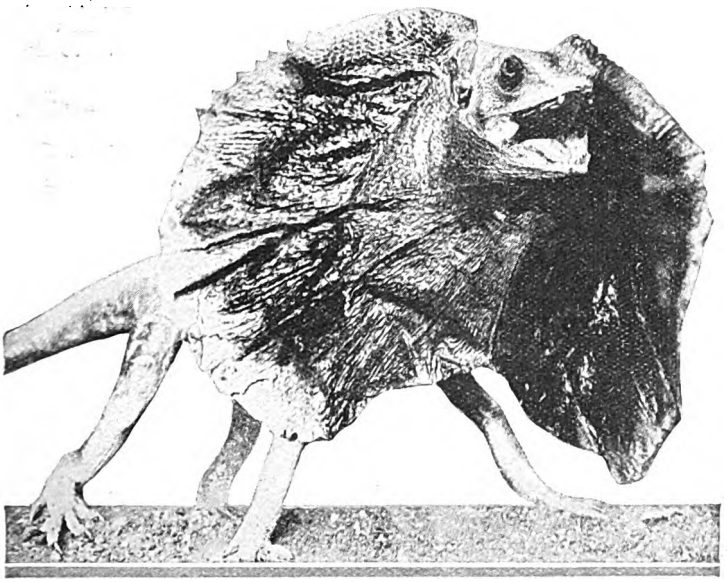

Photo: Clarke.

The Australian frilled lizard. The grotesqueness of some lizards is enhanced by the habit of displaying the interior of the widely-opened mouth.

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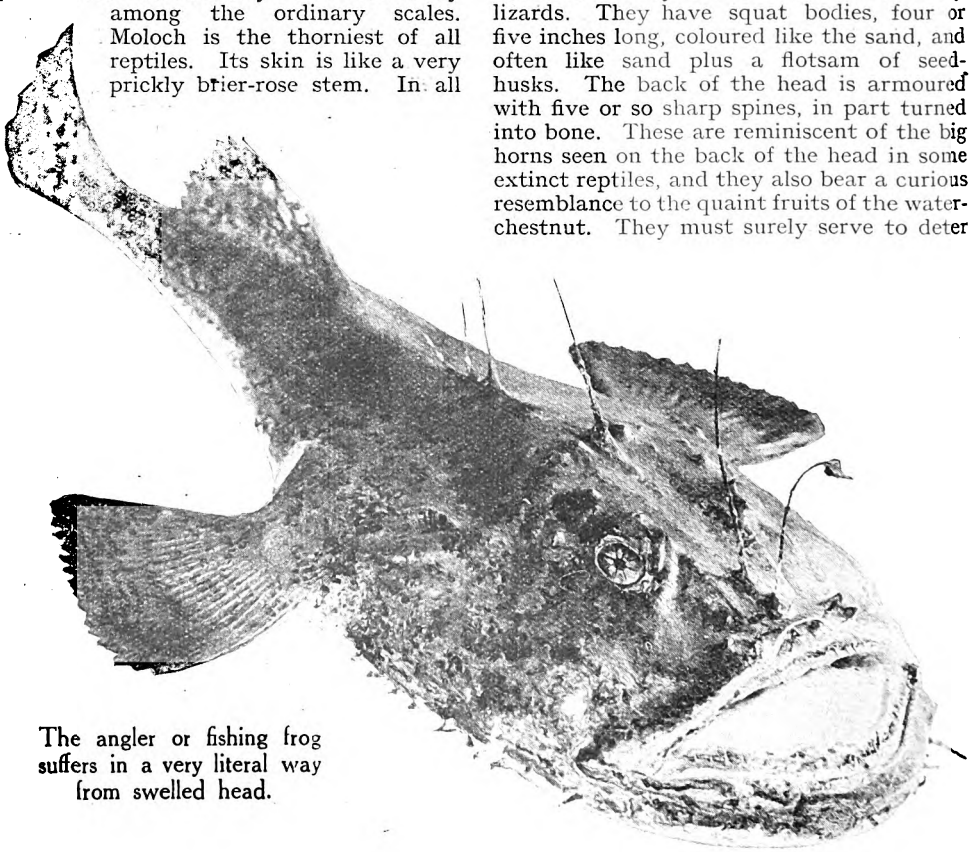
dangling bait of greenish skin which hangs over the mouth at the end of a fishing rod. This remarkable arrangement is a specialization of the first fin-ray of the back fin, which becomes a rod movable up and down on a hinged base. In some deep-sea anglers the bait is luminescent.

When the angler is hatched in the open sea out of a floating purplish veil of thousands of eggs it is not very peculiar, but soon it develops numerous long skin-tassels which increase its power of floating. At a certain stage the head begins to broaden out, the body becomes squat, the creature sinks to the sea-floor, where it spends most of its adult life. It is not infrequently stranded on British coasts, and when we see it—often a yard long—lying squat on the sand, we see a grotesque.

In sandy districts in Western and Southern Australia there lives a remarkable lizard whose name is Moloch horridus. It is very familiar as a specimen, but very little is known about its habits. It has a depressed body with a rather short tail—for a lizard. Nor is its head conspicuous except for bearing sundry big spines, almost like horns. Similar spines occur abundantly over the body among the ordinary scales. Moloch is the thorniest of all reptiles. Its skin is like a very prickly brier-rose stem. In all probability the animal is very gentle, for its mouth is very small. The likelihood is that it feeds in an unobtrusive way on ants. Yet the old naturalists who continued Adam's task of naming the beasts called this quaint innocent after the heathen deity Moloch, who required human beings as his victims. And they also called the creature "horridus," whereas the artists to whom I have shown the museum specimen regard it as an æsthetic harmony. I doubt if any unprejudiced observer, emancipated from our conventions and traditions about the beautiful, would fail to be delighted with this quaint creature. Free enjoying is almost as rare as free thinking. We must not pass from this libelled creature without noticing Professor Willey's interesting observation that its skin is very absorptive of moisture—a useful property for an animal living in dry and parched lands. He happened to put a live specimen into water, and noticed that the skin sucked it up like blotting paper. But this is an aside.

In arid regions in Arizona, Texas, and other western parts of North America there are several kinds of horned toads or phrynosomes. They are not toads but scaly lizards. They have squat bodies, four or five inches long, coloured like the sand, and often like sand plus a flotsam of seed-husks. The back of the head is armoured with five or so sharp spines, in part turned into bone. These are reminiscent of the big horns seen on the back of the head in some extinct reptiles, and they also bear a curious resemblance to the quaint fruits of the water-chestnut. They must surely serve to deter



The angler or fishing frog suffers in a very literal way from swelled head.

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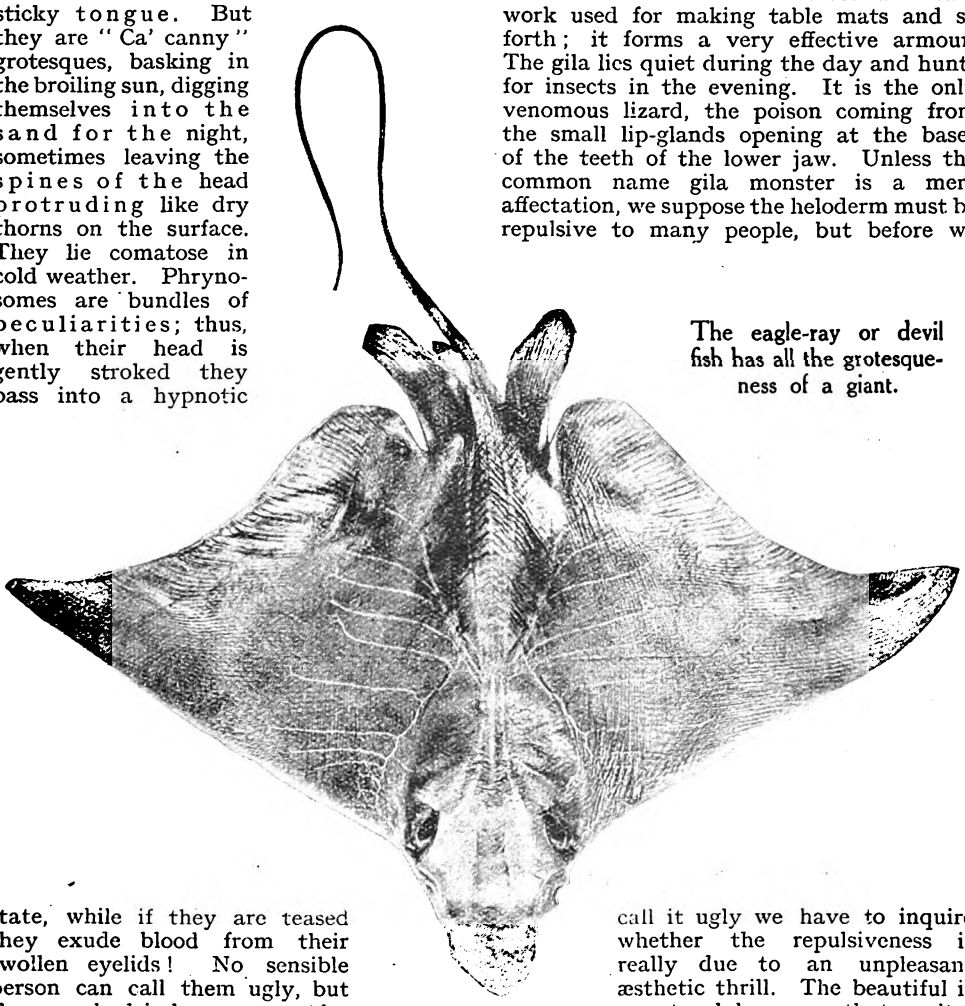
imprudent assailants from biting at the horned toad's head. The little creatures feed on insects, which they usually stalk with deliberation and catch with their sticky tongue. But they are "Ca' canny" grotesques, basking in the broiling sun, digging themselves into the sand for the night, sometimes leaving the spines of the head protruding like dry thorns on the surface. They lie comatose in cold weather. Phrynosomes are bundles of peculiarities; thus, when their head is gently stroked they pass into a hypnotic state, while if they are teased they exude blood from their swollen eyelids! No sensible person can call them ugly, but they rank high among the grotesques.



The eagle-ray or devil fish has all the grotesqueness of a giant.

In not a few lizards the grotesqueness is enhanced by the habit of displaying the interior of the widely-opened mouth, which has sometimes a livid red colour. This gaping is a sign of strong excitement, and may be exhibited when the creature is standing at bay or when it is courting. It is quaint to think of yawning as part of the courtship ritual. Perhaps the climax is reached in the extraordinary Jew lizard or bearded dragon, which must be seen to be believed, and is difficult enough even then.

The name of gila monster is often given to a unique lizard, the poisonous heloderm of Mexico and Arizona. They are large, sluggish creatures, towards two feet in length, with a plump tail and with the usual scales turned into rounded beads. The skin is like the old-fashioned Victorian beadwork used for making table mats and so forth; it forms a very effective armour. The gila lies quiet during the day and hunts for insects in the evening. It is the only venomous lizard, the poison coming from the small lip-glands opening at the bases of the teeth of the lower jaw. Unless the common name gila monster is a mere affectation, we suppose the heloderm must be repulsive to many people, but before we call it ugly we have to inquire whether the repulsiveness is really due to an unpleasant æsthetic thrill. The beautiful is a natural harmony that excites a pleasant æsthetic emotion. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." The ugly is a discord that is æsthetically unpleasant. But perhaps the heloderm displeases us not because it is grotesque, but because it is venomous, sluggish, and large. I confess that I do not much believe in the existence of ugly wild animals.

In many a geological age there have been giants, those of to-day being the whales, which may attain to a length of over eighty feet. Similarly there were Carboniferous amphibians as big as donkeys, and the Jurassic reptile Atlantosaurus must have been one hundred and fifteen feet long. But while we readily speak of "extinct monsters," the majority of the giants seem

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to have been as well-proportioned as the whales of to-day. There is nothing of the grotesque in a blue whale eighty-five feet long. The idea of the grotesque is associated with lack of proportion and harmony, or with some feature so unexpected that we cannot but smile. A sequoia or Californian big tree may be three thousand years old and three hundred feet high; it may show a girth such that a carriage and pair may be driven through a tunnel in the base of the grandiose stem; but all is in such perfect proportion that everyone admires the tree as magnificent.

At the same time there are two reasons why a huge creature sometimes approaches the grotesque. In the first place, deviations from proportion are likely to be more marked when the creature is on a big scale; and, secondly, our æsthetic taste is apt to be shocked when there is what may be called a lack of restraint in the use of materials. An elephant approaches the grotesque in having such an extraordinarily long nose; and in regard to the male narwhal we feel that no creature has any business to have a tooth longer than its body.

A skate's egg is enclosed in a four-cornered shell of horn, called a mermaid's purse," which lies on the floor of the sea, but is sometimes tossed up on the beach after the young skate has emerged by a slit at one end. If one has the good fortune to see a young skate hatched out in an aquarium, one cannot but be struck by its neat elegance. It is undeniably pretty. But suppose this to grow to the huge proportions of some of the giants that have been caught, the element of the grotesque begins to loom large. All the lines have coarsened, and such terms as "huge monster" rise to the observer's lips. Thus one of the largest leopard-rays caught by an angler was seven feet six inches across the wings, six feet nine inches from the head to the base of the tail, while the dangerous tail itself was nine feet six inches long. The weight of the whole was four hundred and ten pounds, and yet the fish was captured by rod and line!

Some of the eagle-rays, which are just exaggerated skates, are portentous. Thus the vampire-ray of the East Indies may have an expanse of twenty feet across the flat body, and one is not surprised to read that "it is much dreaded by the divers who fish for pearls near Panama, whom it is said to devour after enveloping them in its vast wings."

When dimensions are so huge, any exaggeration of a part, such as the tail in the sting-ray, or the eye-bearing sides of the head in the hammer-headed shark, or the toothed snout in the sawfish, is likely to result in a grotesque. The bizarre fishes called chimæras often get the popular name of "spooks."

But if there is a competition among queer fishes, it is probable that the prize for grotesqueness would go to some of those that live in the eternal night and eternal winter of the deep sea. For some of them show an extraordinary development of

The skin of *Moloch horridus* is like a very prickly brier-rose stem.

gape," so that from one point of view they seem all mouth. They are the less likely to miss their booty when they get a chance, and more than one of them is known to be able to swallow another fish larger than itself. Others show an extreme development of a tactile barbule, which may be much longer than the body, and is obviously well-suited for the tentative exploration of the darkness. Some are almost blind, yet others have big goggle eyes, which are possibly suited for utilizing the gleams of luminescence. Others are generously equipped with light-producing organs, sometimes extraordinarily like eyes. A not uncommon feature is the great elongation of the tapering tail, which hints

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at the extreme stillness of the great depths. Two facts impress us: first, that the apparently grotesque is sometimes a subtle adaptation to peculiar conditions. Thus, when the lower jaw works on a far-back hinge like the lid of a coal-scuttle upside down, the result is to increase the gape and to help the fish to make the most of its meals, which are apt to be few and far between. Secondly, when a creature has a secure position in the struggle for existence, it may, so to speak, indulge the widespread tendency of life to be original.

A giraffe can lift its mouth eighteen feet above the ground to pluck a twig from an acacia tree. An armadillo trundles about with a mobile basket of bone over its body, and it can roll itself up, like a hedgehog, into an unopenable living ball. The kangaroo takes prodigious leaps, sometimes over fifteen feet, and it looks very quaint when it stands at rest, using its tail as the third leg of a tripod. A finishing touch is given to the quaintness when the young kangaroo pops its head out of the mother's skin pocket and takes a look round.

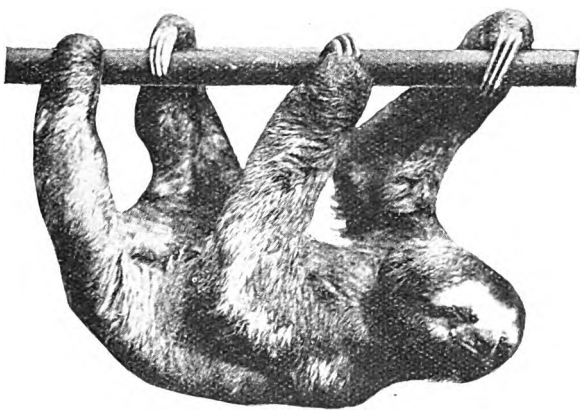

Photo: Bona

The tree-sloth moves back downwards along the underside of the branches, holding on with its long hooked claws.

The tree-sloth moves back downwards along the underside of the branches, holding on with its long hooked claws. With its shaggy hair, tinged green by a growth of unicellular algæ, it looks like a moving mass of lichens. Buffon selected the tree-sloths as instances of imperfection in Nature. "One more defect," he wrote, "and they could not have existed." But this was hopelessly wrong, for the tree-sloths are eminently perfect in their adaptations to arboreal life. This is a lesson that must be kept in mind when we look at these apparent grotesques; their weirdness is often consummately fit. At times, however, as in the case of the narwhal's tusk, what can we say except that there is a momentum in evolution that often tends to exaggeration, as long as the limits of safety and everyday success are not exceeded. This is particularly true of decorations, which tend to be over-exuberant.

Nature is all for health and she does not tolerate anything unwholesome or decrepit. It is true that the door leading to parasitism is not closed, and that way ugliness lies, but the majority of animals are healthy and beautiful. But there is difficult beauty and easy beauty, and it is often in sheer carelessness that an observer condemns an animal like the octopus as ugly. He is willing to take some pains over a picture to discover its beauty, but he libels an animal at a glance. Apart from parasites, half-finished creatures, and obese domesticated forms on which man has left the marks of his fingers, almost all animals are beautiful. Goethe spoke of Nature as an artist, "working up the most uniform material into utter opposites; arriving without a trace of effort at perfection." In other words, a living creature is an adventure in self-expression, and the supreme condition of maintaining effective life is harmony. Thus, while there are many grotesques, there are no contradictions. It is possible, indeed, to find queer abnormalities, such as one sometimes sees among the skates at a great fish market, but they do not affect essentials. As Goethe said: "that which is most unnatural is still Nature." Therefore, while admitting the occurrence of some grotesques, idiosyncrasies, extravagances, and exaggerations, let us hold firmly to the larger truth that Nature sifts towards beauty and harmony. "A leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars, and the pismire is equally perfect, and the grain of sand, and the egg of the wren, and the tree-toad is a *chef d'œuvre* for the highest, and the running blackberry would adorn the parlours of heaven. . . . And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels."

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The Stubborn End

By

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Illustrated by
S. ABBEY

THEIR heads were very close together over the worn leather top of Chief Inspector Absolom's desk. Brett was acutely conscious of the perfume of the great bunch of dark violets Lady Muriel was wearing.

"Here is my *bonne bouche*," she announced, laying a sheet of paper upon the table between the two men. "Presently I will explain how it came into my possession."

The letter, which they pored over together, was written on a sheet of business note-paper, stamped at the top:—

From
Gonzales and Ardron,
Fruit Importers and Brokers,
Riverside Street Wharves, E.C.3.

The Management,
Milan Hotel, W.C.2.

Dear Sirs,

Our Barcelona agents have asked that a small suite may be reserved in the Court on the afternoon of the second of November, for their representative, Mr. Paul Gilmott, and another room as near as possible for his secretary, Señor Sacrosta. These gentlemen will arrive at Victoria by the afternoon train from the Continent.

Kindly confirm the reservation.

Faithfully yours,
GONZALES AND ARDRON.

The two men looked up inquiringly.

"That letter," Lady Muriel explained, "was dictated by Matthew early in the morning on the day of the raid. The first thing of which I was conscious when I woke up was the clicking of the typewriter. He was giving letters down to a secretary in the next cabin. Then came an alarm. I suppose, as usual, some of his spies brought in news of your doings. He hurried away, and the secretary followed him. My door wasn't locked then. I looked out and picked up this sheet of paper in the companion-way."

"The second of November!" Absolom exclaimed.

"The second of November!" Brett echoed, excitedly.

"Well, what about it?" Lady Muriel inquired. "Does the date mean anything to you?"

"It does indeed," the Chief acknowledged. "The second of November is the date upon which we have been asked to safeguard the transference of a considerable number of priceless precious stones from the Royal Palace to the Tower."

"Not the Crown Jewels?" Lady Muriel cried.

Absolom shook his head.

"There is a great deal of wonderful jewellery belonging to the Royal Family," he confided, "acquired by them at various times, which is not included in what are historically known as the Crown Jewels. As you are aware, their Majesties are going abroad for three months on November the third, and they have expressed a desire that this jewellery should be sent to the Tower for safe-keeping during their absence."

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There was a brief but very tense silence. Brett was drumming upon the table with nervous fingers.

"Even for Matthew," the Chief Inspector muttered, "this would be a mad enterprise."

"But the man is mad," Brett declared, harshly. "Everything points to it. Besides, hasn't he announced openly that he is going to bring off one great *coup* and disappear?"

"He'll disappear all right," Absolom prophesied. "We have proved that he is not so infallible as he thinks. If this is his scheme, he'll disappear between the trap-doors with a rope round his neck."

Lady Muriel shivered.

"But why," she ventured, "should he choose a well-known hotel like the Milan to work from? He has always had such wonderful hiding-places."

"Has had," the Chief Inspector observed dryly. "You must remember that we've wiped out two or three of them. To come boldly to an hotel like the Milan, with his wonderful gift of disguise, is really a stroke of genius. It is just what I should have expected from the man. If he really tries to bring off this *coup*, I shouldn't be surprised to see him attempt it from one of the Royal carriages. The second of November."

He glanced at the calendar upon the wall.

"Four days," he continued, thoughtfully.

The telephone bell rang. Absolom spoke for a few minutes and rang off. Then he glanced at the clock.

"That's rather opportune," he remarked. "Lady Muriel, you'll have to excuse us. The Comptroller of the Household at the Royal Palace wants to see us about making arrangements for the transference of the jewels. Brett, you'd better come with me."

Lady Muriel rose regretfully to her feet.

"Mine is a hard life," she complained. "I submit to an abduction and go through no end of drudgery for the benefit of the law, and when a really interesting assignation comes along I'm not even invited. I should love to see those jewels."

Absolom smiled as he took down his overcoat from its peg.

"Lady Muriel," he said, "we can't take you to the Royal Palace with us, but if things go our way this time"—he pointed to the letter still lying upon the table—"you'll be able to buy your country cottage and a couple of hunters."

"Blood money!" she shuddered.

"The best money in the world if it's Matthew's blood," was the fervent rejoinder.

AT precisely a quarter-past three on the afternoon of the second of November, two tall young footmen in the undress Royal livery, superintended by a grey-headed butler, staggered out of one of the seldom-used side entrances of the Royal Palace and hoisted a small chest which they had been carrying into a police van drawn up with its open door a few feet only from the threshold. Three policemen superintended the operation, and three more, who were already in the van, helped to draw the chest to the farther end of the vehicle. The constable who had been guarding the door mounted the step, called out to the driver, and the van moved off. As it left the gates of the Palace and turned into the road, two other cars, each containing four plain-clothes policemen, drew into the procession, one in front and one behind. A limousine, which had been waiting inside the railings, and in which were seated the Chief Inspector and Brett, with a plain-clothes policeman on the box, joined the column. They passed along Pall Mall, down Northumberland Avenue, and on to the Embankment, the escorting cars drawing so near to the police van that there was only a few feet of space between them all. Many curious glances were thrown at the little *cortège*, but its progress was absolutely uneventful. In precisely thirty-five minutes the strongly-guarded gates of the Tower were opened to admit it, and the van pulled up exactly opposite the main entrance to the building. The policemen emerged, the doors were opened, and, surrounded by a strong escort, the chest was carried inside, along a corridor, and down some steps into the famous strong-room. Here the Governor himself, with the keys in his hand, was waiting. The Chief Inspector saluted.

"Box from the Royal Palace, Sir Gregory," he announced.

They all stood round whilst the Governor unlocked a particular section of the amazing series of steel chambers. A door glided noiselessly back, an electric light flamed out, and the chest was pushed home into its resting-place. Absolom turned to Brett with a little sigh of relief, mingled perhaps with a shade of regret.

"False alarm after all, Brett," he observed.

"It seems so," was the doubtful assent.

There was a sharp tinkle from the bell of the house telephone just inside the door. One of the attendants answered it, and hurried over to the Governor.

"Will you speak at once, sir?" he begged. "It is a message from the Royal Palace. You are switched through down here."

Sir Gregory took the receiver. There

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was a sudden change in his face as he listened.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Yes—yes. I'll telephone the result."

He turned back towards the little group. There were two of the Tower guards in the background, four of the plain-clothes men, the Chief Inspector, and Brett. The huge door of the strong-room was still open, and the recently arrived chest stood in one of the private compartments over which was emblazoned the Royal Arms. The Governor unfastened his coat, and from a chain which was interwoven with a belt he drew a thin key.

"Are you going to open the box, sir?" the Chief Inspector asked, with a sudden thrill of alarm.

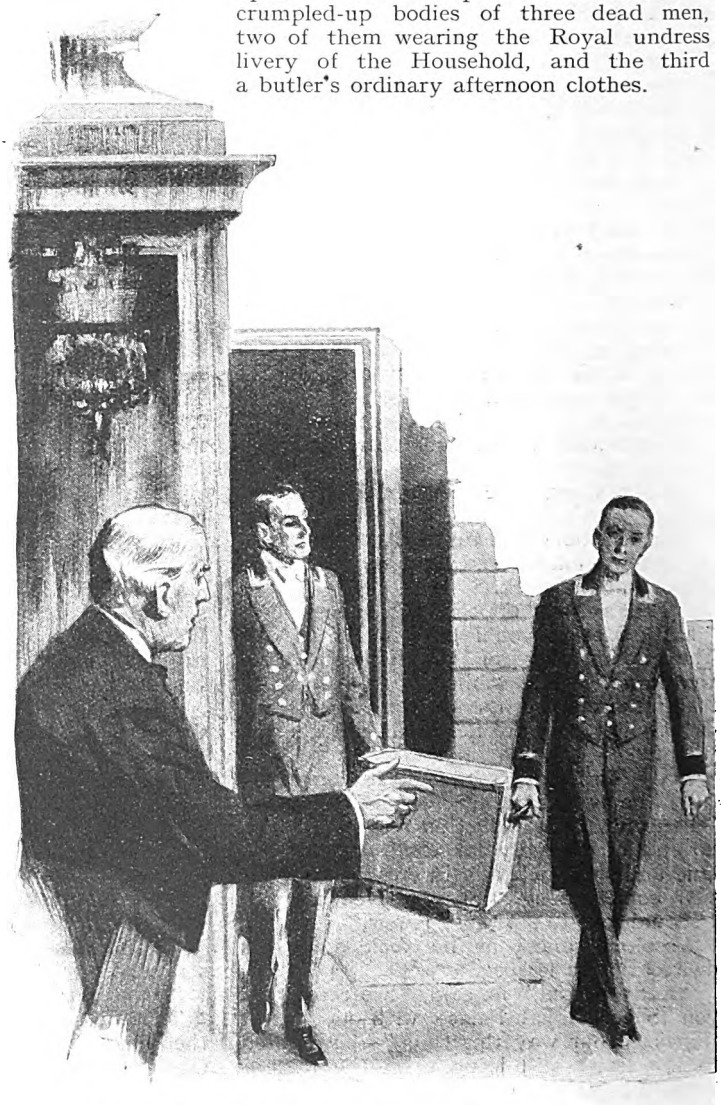
"Instructions from the Royal Palace," was the breathless reply. "This is a pass-key to all the Royal coffers."

He thrust it into the lock, turned it twice, juggled with it for a moment, and touched what seemed to be a spring. The lid of the chest flew open. Inside, on the top of the metal tray, were neatly arranged strips of sheet iron. The rest of the box was filled in the same manner. He rose to his feet, and pointed downwards with a shaking finger.

"Half a million pounds' worth of jewels stolen under your very nose, Mr. Absolom!" he cried. "Thank God, I have a dozen witnesses that no one approached the chest after it had entered these precincts."

Neither of the two men wasted a single minute in incredulous and useless exclamations. They hurried out to their car, and a few seconds later were flying along the Embankment. . . .

At the Royal Palace the guards at every gate were doubled, and it was not until the Chief Inspector had disclosed their identity that they were allowed to pass. They made at once for the entrance from which the van had started. A detective sergeant from Scotland Yard was waiting for them, and motioned them to follow him up the stairs. At the first turn a rope had been hastily tied from the banisters to a hook in the wall. From here there were seven steps, and again an abrupt turn upwards. In various positions and angles upon the seven steps were stretched the crumpled-up bodies of three dead men, two of them wearing the Royal undress livery of the Household, and the third a butler's ordinary afternoon clothes.



Two tall young footmen, superintended by a grey-headed entrances of the Royal Palace and hoisted a small chest up with its open door only a

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"Not a thing has been touched, sir," the sergeant announced. "Ten minutes after you left, when I was thinking of removing my men, the alarm came from one of the servants."

"Ten minutes!" Brett exclaimed, the words flashing from his lips.

"These stairs are very seldom used, sir," the man explained. "Even the two or three rooms on the floor above have an exit on to a different staircase."

The doctor, who had been bending over one of the bodies, stepped underneath the ropes and drew himself upright.

"The most horrible affair I ever came across in my life," he confessed.

"All three men must have been stabbed almost simultaneously from behind, and in each case the knife reached the heart. Three different knives, all of the same pattern. It's incredible! The whole thing's more like the Middle Ages."

He mopped his forehead.

"They are servants of the Household, I suppose?" Absolom asked the sergeant.

"Two footmen and the butler to the Stewards' Room—been in the Royal service for over thirty years."

The Chief Inspector turned to the physician.

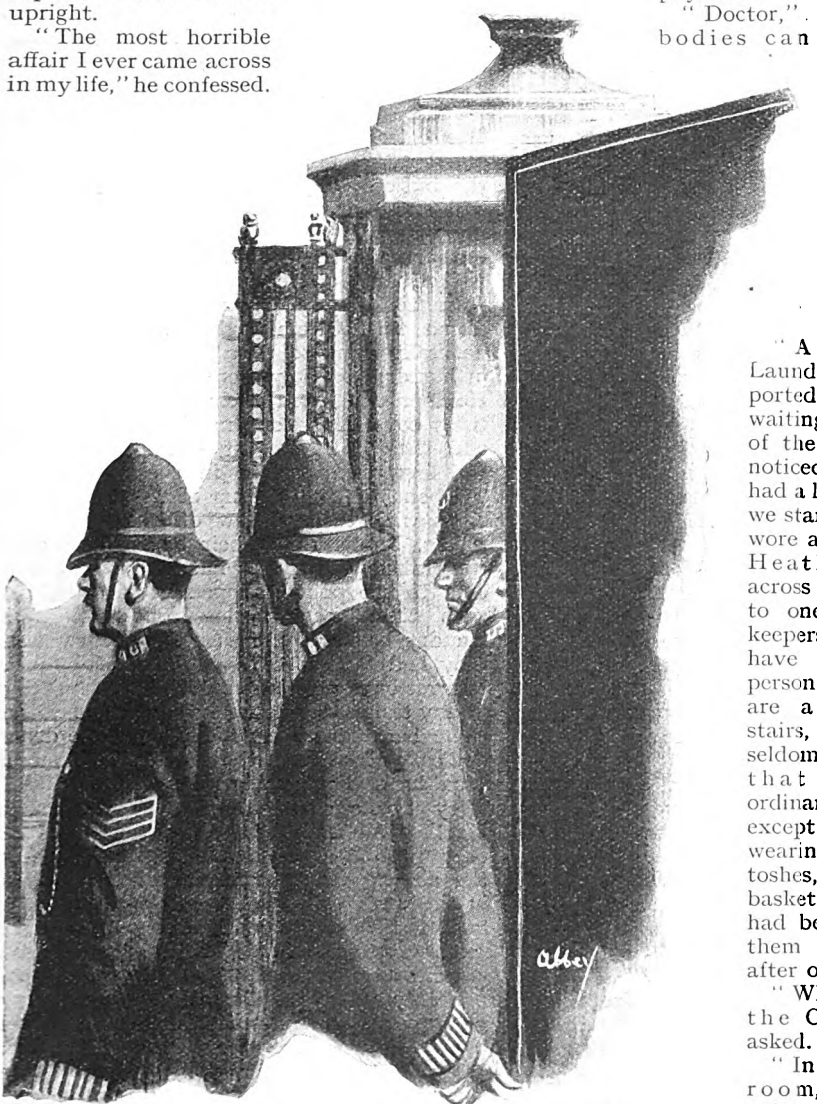
"Doctor," he said, "the bodies can be moved to the mortuary, but nothing else must be touched."

Brett made his rapid appearance from one of the servants' sitting-rooms. He drew his Chief on one side.

"A Pink Heather Laundry van," he reported quickly, "was waiting against the side of the house there. I noticed it—in fact, I had a look inside before we started. The driver wore a hat with 'Pink Heather Laundry' across it. I've talked to one of the housekeepers, who seems to have been the only person about. These are a sort of back stairs, you see—very seldom used. She says that three of the ordinary laundry-men, except that they were wearing long mackintoshes, carried out a basket of laundry which had been prepared for them a few seconds after our departure."

"Where is she?" the Chief Inspector asked.

"In this sitting-room, sir," Brett pointed out, leading the way. "She is in a terrible state of nerves."



butler, staggered out of one of the seldom-used side which they had been carrying into a police van drawn few feet from the threshold

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Absolom was in no mood to respect the condition of anyone. He pushed his way into the room.

"Madam," he demanded, "you had laundry prepared for the Pink Heather Company to-day?"

"Yes," she acknowledged; "the men called for it just after the police van left."

"The usual men?"

"They seemed so to me, sir. They were wearing the Pink Heather caps. The only thing was that, although it wasn't raining, they wore long mackintoshes."

"They took the laundry away?"

"Yes, sir. I saw the van drive off."

"Then what's that?" Brett asked, pointing to a corner of the room.

She looked across and stared. Then she rose to her feet, readjusting her spectacles.

"Why, I believe——" she faltered.

Brett flicked aside the rug which covered the hamper and wrenched open the lid.

"The laundry is here," he announced.

The old lady was bewildered.

"I saw the basket carried——"

"Madam," the Chief Inspector intervened, "will you be so good as to make no statement or answer any questions? Not a word, mind, about that basket or anything else."

"Not a word," the old lady promised, her voice half-choked with sobs.

Absolom had already raised the receiver from the telephone instrument which stood against the wall.

"Exchange," he called. "Listen! This is Scotland Yard speaking from the Royal Palace. Give me the number of the Pink Heather Laundry Company—urgent! You can disconnect anything necessary. This is official."

In less than twenty seconds a voice was announcing itself as the Pink Heather Laundry Company.

"Scotland Yard speaking," the Chief Inspector repeated. "Have you sent to the Royal Palace to-day for servants' laundry?"

"The car is leaving in five minutes," the voice replied. "We received a telephone message to say the things would not be ready before four."

'How many vans have you?"

"Two; but one is at the repairers', out of order."

"And you are certain that the other car has not left?"

"Certain," was the confident reply. "It is standing in the yard now."

The Chief Inspector rang off.

"Matthew at his best," he groaned, turning towards Brett. "Come along."

A QUARTER OF AN HOUR later the two men were closeted in the Chief Inspector's office at Scotland Yard. Absolom was walking restlessly up and down the room. Brett was hungrily watching the telephone. The whole of the detective system of London was at work from one end of the city to the other.

"Let's hear your reconstruction, Brett," the Chief Inspector demanded, suddenly relapsing into his chair and lighting a cigarette. "I think you're on the right track."

"It's fairly simple, I'm afraid," was the doleful acknowledgment. "A perfect revelation of Matthew's methods—thorough from beginning to end, every joint in place. These footmen are pretty well all alike, so there wasn't any trouble about that. The elderly man is a well-known figure, and I rather fancy Matthew himself played the butler. They hired or bought a van and had 'Pink Heather Laundry' painted upon it, had suits of livery made for two footmen and the butler, procured a laundry basket, and drove boldly up to a back entrance. Any servant who might see them round the bottom flight of stairs would naturally suppose that they were bringing in laundry, as they were wearing the Pink Heather caps, and their liveries were entirely covered by long mackintoshes. They left their basket just out of sight of the first turn, waited in the lavatory at the bend for the coming of the three men, dealt with them, threw off their mackintoshes, brought out their bogus box from the laundry basket, handed it gravely over to the police, slipped back again, on with their mackintoshes, out with the laundry basket containing the chest which they had taken from the three dead men. It must have been an exciting few minutes; at any time someone might have come down those back stairs and found the three dead bodies. However, they had Matthew's usual luck. Everything went well for them. They hoisted the basket into the Pink Heather van and drove off. Inside the van they probably had a kit-bag waiting for the chest. They exchanged their clothes in the van, stuffed the bogus ones into the basket, tied it up again, and got rid of it some way or another. They would have to get rid of the basket because they were probably able to disguise the van by pulling slats down, but if it was searched the basket would give them away at once. We've two hundred and fifty men in the streets looking for that van and that basket, and every police telephone in London inquiring about it. It's a wonderful *coup*, but they'll still have to be amazingly clever and amazingly lucky to get away with it."

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The telephone bell rang. Brett took off the receiver.

"Brett speaking."

'Sergeant Hannaford reporting from Victoria Station. A laundry basket has been left at the Suburban Cloak Room. Opened it according to instructions. Two suits of footmen's uniform, a dress coat, black waistcoat, and a pair of grey trousers were discovered inside."

"Good. Any sign of the van?"

"Not so far as we're concerned, sir," was the reply. "We have reason to believe, however, that the three men left it in Victoria Station."

"Any description?"

"Nothing reliable, sir. A porter brought in the laundry basket, but there's an impression in his mind that there were three men who slipped out of the car, although only one received the ticket for the basket. The one who received the ticket seems to have gone away alone. The other two, he believes, entered the station, but he couldn't identify them. Hold the line, please, sir."

There was a moment's silence. Then the Sergeant spoke again.

"The van's been found, sir," he announced. "It's standing in Victoria Station yard, empty. The Pink Heather sign was covered up—a thin slat worked over it with a spring. The porter identifies it, however, as the one the laundry basket came in."

"Good work," Brett said, encouragingly. "Now inquire as to the running of the boat train. See that the exchange hold the line."

There was a few moments' silence. Then the Sergeant's voice again.

"Boat train a quarter of an hour late, sir."

"Be on the platform," Brett ordered.

He laid down the receiver. Absolom was perplexed.

"What's that about the boat train?" he inquired. "No one who arrives by it could have had a hand in this job."

"Quite so," Brett agreed, thoughtfully, "and yet I can't get it out of my mind that something may happen in connection with the arrival of Mr. Gilmott and Señor Sacrosta from the Continent this afternoon."

WITH his coat collar turned up to his chin, and his hat pushed over his eyes, Brett, from the shelter of the bookstall, some distance away from the main platform, watched the thoroughfare devoted to vehicles awaiting the arrival of the Continental train. There were a dozen or more cars, and a few taxicabs with their flags down. The report as to their occupants had already been brought to him by Hannaford, who was lounging by the kerb. Suddenly a light flashed into his eyes, and he drew a little farther back into the shelter of the bookstall. A car driven by a chauffeur in plain livery had pulled up by the side of the arrival platform. There were two kit-bags and a trunk upon the top. Brett stepped cautiously out of the shelter of the bookstall, raised his hand, and dropped it again. A moment later Hannaford was turning over the magazines by his side.

"Two passengers inside," he announced. "One middle-aged, well-dressed—heavy fur coat—good-looking, wearing a monocle, smoking a cigarette; the other, shorter, dark, horn-rimmed spectacles, looks like a foreigner. The first man is reading the evening paper, but the other is looking out of the back window all the time, watching for the train."

Even as they were talking a taxicab, also with luggage on the roof, drove up the broad way and took its place behind the car. In response to a glance from Brett, Hannaford hurried off, only to return a few minutes later, looking distinctly puzzled.

"Queer thing, sir," he reported. "There's a middle-aged gentleman and a small dark man in the taxicab, too. They're all muffled up so that one can't see their faces. . . . Train's coming in, sir."

There was the usual stir upon the crowded platform. Porters were abandoning their listless attitudes and standing to attention. The little groups of people waiting to receive friends changed their positions restlessly. The long train, its engine sobbing, came stealing into the station. Brett, however, scarcely glanced in its direction, nor did he take any further notice of the car and the waiting taxicab. He strolled along to the automobile which had brought him from Scotland Yard and stepped in, followed by Hannaford.

"Milan Hotel," he directed.

A DISTINGUISHED-LOOKING new arrival, wrapped in a heavy fur coat, leaned over the desk of the reception office in the Milan Hotel.

"You have rooms for me, I believe," he said. "Mr. Paul Gilmott, and my secretary, Mr. Sacrosta. They were engaged by my London agents."

The clerk smiled courteously.

"Quite right, sir. You have suite number eighty-nine in the Court, and your secretary number eighty-five. If you will step across with me, I will show you the rooms."

He lifted the flap and stepped outside. On their progress towards the swing doors, the gentleman who had announced himself as Mr. Paul Gilmott paused and surveyed the crowded lounge with the air of one seeking for a possible acquaintance. His eyes rested

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for a moment upon the distant corner where Brett was seated, but without apparently taking particular note of him. Outside, in the courtyard, however, he leaned for a moment through the window of a taxicab which had just driven up. If a word was spoken it was no more than a word. Afterwards he followed the reception clerk and his secretary into the entrance to the Court. Brett sprang to his feet and kicked viciously at the leg of a chair near which he was standing.

"Hannaford," he muttered, "I shall never make a detective as long as I live. When the critical time comes I always do the wrong thing. Quick!"

They crossed the floor to the exit with almost flying footsteps. A taxicab was just turning out of the yard—the taxicab which had drawn up a few minutes before laden with luggage, as though its occupants had meant to descend. Brett threw himself into the police car which was waiting, and gave a word or two of directions to the man upon the box.

"It's all right," he exclaimed, with a little sigh of relief. "Nevertheless, I was a damned fool."

HALF AN HOUR later the Chief Inspector pushed open the saloon-bar door of a small public-house on the outskirts of Bermondsey. Brett, who was awaiting him, passed a whisky and soda across the oilcloth-topped table.

"Well, I'm up to time, but it was pretty strenuous work," the former remarked.

"Have you got the men posted, sir?" Brett asked.

"Forty of them. Mind you, too, we haven't kept the Gonzales wharf and warehouse under observation all this time without finding out something. There were half-a-dozen trap-holes there at least. They are every one blocked by this time, and the river police are out all the way to Gravesend. The *Juanita's* lying in dock, getting up steam. What brought you on this scent? We want to give the men another five minutes."

"I'll tell you," Brett explained. "I'm perfectly certain Matthew's original idea was to arrive at the Milan as though he'd come by the boat train, and take the rooms which had been engaged for him. What his next move would have been I can't say, but the getting in and out of the big hotels is always easy. With his usual thoroughness, he took the most meticulous precautions. Two cars arrived at the Milan, one with the real Matthew, and I think Vanderleyde, and the other with the imitation Matthew, who was to arrive first and make sure that the coast was clear. If the first two had reported nothing suspicious, they would have changed places at some convenient time, and the two were so much alike that no one would ever have noticed. Unfortunately, I made one of my usual blunders. I wasn't quite out of sight in the lounge, and the imitation Matthew must have seen me, although he never gave a sign. He just whispered a word through the window of the taxi, and off it went. I followed as far as here. Then, when I knew where they were going, I crept into hiding and telephoned to you."

"This looks like the end of things," Absolom said, gravely. "We are holding Gilmott and his secretary at the Milan, but there's no doubt as to the real man. He can't get away this time, Brett. We've got him cornered, but it means a bad job for some of us."

"We're going through with it," Brett declared, stoutly. "He can't kill forty or fifty of us, sir. I'm ready to be one of the first, and I'm pretty certain there are plenty of our men who won't funk it. It's not your job, you know, sir. You've got to direct proceedings, but to make arrests doesn't come within your province."

The Chief Inspector smiled.

"We'll see," he said. "Ready?"

"Quite."

They drove almost in silence to Riverside Street, and down that dingy thoroughfare to the end. On the left, the gates leading to the warehouses were open, and in the little crowd of loiterers both men recognized familiar faces. The gates opening out on to the wharf, however, were locked. Brett shook them impatiently. One of the apparent loiterers from the yard hurried up, his hand upon the shoulder of a surly-looking man.

"This is the watchman, sir," he announced. "I found him trying to clear off with the keys in his pocket."

"Open these gates," the Chief Inspector directed.

The man scowled at him.

"Who might you be, giving me orders?" he demanded. "Them gates lead on to the Gonzales wharf, and I've had strict orders to lock them and keep them locked."

"I'm a Detective Inspector of Scotland Yard," was the curt reply. "Open those gates without a second's hesitation or you'll find yourself in trouble."

The man obeyed, but his expression was still truculent.

"There'll be trouble enough for all of yer before long," he muttered. "There they go, and I hope you'll like what yer find."

A patrol wagon containing half-a-dozen plain-clothes men had pulled up behind the

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police car. The Chief Inspector glanced them over.

"All got your automatics ready?" he asked.

There was a murmur of assent. They were six very grim and determined-looking men.

"Come along, then. We're going to board this steamer. It's Matthew we're after. We've got every loophole landwards watched, but he got away from us once by the river."

"He won't do it this time, sir," Brett declared cheerfully, pointing to a long, curiously-shaped boat some thirty or forty yards distant. "That's the Tower Bridge police barge; and they've got a forty-horse-power engine."

"This way, then," the other directed.

THEY filed out on to the cobbled pavement of the wharf, and made their way along towards the side of the steamer. For the time of year and the locality it was a fairly clear evening. There were a few drifting clouds of mist, but the sky-signs on the opposite side of the river were all plainly visible as well as the lights from passing boats. The tide was low, and there was very little traffic, although every now and then there was the usual scream of tugs passing underneath the bridge. The Chief Inspector, with Brett by his side, walked on until they reached about midships of the steamer. There was no gangway plank down, and the whole of the deck seemed to be in darkness. The portholes below, however, were all brilliantly illuminated.

"*Juanita* ahoy!" the Chief Inspector hailed.

There was silence for a moment, then a sailor slouched over from the bows of the vessel. He was an untidy-looking person, and he spoke with a strong foreign accent.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "No one allowed on board."

"Throw over the gangway," the Chief Inspector ordered, sternly. "The police are coming on board."

The head and shoulders of another man suddenly appeared in the companion-way. The little group gazed at him breathlessly. He was tall, with dark hair flecked with grey, a clean-shaven face, keen eyes, and with that strange upward curve of the mouth which Brett recognized in a moment.

"Visitors!" he observed. "What might be your business?"

"You, Matthew," the Chief Inspector announced in a voice of authority. "Tell your men to throw across a gangway. We are coming on board."

"All of you?"

"All of us here, and as many more as are necessary. The game's up, Matthew, and let me warn you that you've done enough mischief in this world. It won't do you any good in the end to make our task more difficult."

Matthew made no direct response. He glanced at Brett.

"My little friend Brett is in at the death, I see," he remarked. "A persistent little devil, for all his blunders. Who's coming after the Crown Jewels?"

"I am, for one," the Chief Inspector told him.

"You will find me," Matthew said courteously, "in the end cabin on the port side. I will receive my friend, Mr. Brett. I warn you that no one else had better attempt to approach me. Throw across a gangway," he ordered, turning towards the sailor who was lingering in the background. "*Au revoir*, gentlemen."

He disappeared. In a moment or two a gangway was lowered, and they all trooped on to the deck. The Chief Inspector laid his hand upon Brett's arm.

"Look here, Brett," he said, "you and I know well enough that Matthew means to get you. You're under orders from your superior officer. Burton is going to make the arrest."

Brett's expression was a study in distress.

"But, Mr. Absolom," he begged; "think, sir! If Matthew really wants me, we know what he will do to anyone else. Burton's a married man, too. Let me take my chance, sir. I've worked hard enough for it."

The Chief Inspector's grip was like a vice upon his shoulder. He made a sign to Burton, and the man stepped forward. He had an automatic hidden in his right hand pocket.

"I'll get him all right, sir," he promised. "End cabin on the port side. I'm to shoot if I must."

"Shoot to save your own life."

The man descended the six stairs which led to the long passage. The others crowded round the well-like opening, but the Chief Inspector waved them as far back as possible. The passage was lit by two electric overhead bulbs, and they could just see Burton stepping quietly but firmly along. When he was within about a dozen paces of the end cabin, the door of it opened, a stream of light flashed out, and Matthew appeared.

"Hands up!" Burton shouted—but too late.

He never had a chance to pull the trigger of his own automatic. Matthew had shot upon sight. Burton went spinning round, and then collapsed. There was a pent-up murmur of anger from the crouching men upon the stairs.

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"Why send me the wrong man?" Matthew drawled. "I'm waiting here for Brett."

One of the men half raised his automatic, but the Chief Inspector brushed it on one side.

"We've got to take him alive if we can," he insisted. "Henshaw!"

"Yes, sir."

"Get on to the dock and see if it is possible for him to escape through his porthole."

The man obeyed orders, returning in a very few moments.

"Absolutely impossible, sir," he reported. "A boy couldn't squeeze through. Besides which, there are curved bars."

The Chief Inspector nodded.

"Well, we've got him sooner or later, then," he said. "Poor Burton, I wonder if it's any use——"

"We'll fetch him, sir," Henshaw interrupted. "If he shoots, he shoots."

Two of them crept cautiously along the passage and dragged the prostrate figure to the foot of the steps. Absolom made a brief examination, after which he rose to his feet.

"No good," he pronounced. "He's got it right through the heart, poor fellow! Matthew means to carry to the grave his boast that he never had to shoot twice."

"You'd better let me go now, sir," Brett begged.

The Chief Inspector shook his head.

"Don't you see it would be simply murder?" he pointed out. "Matthew means having you before he's taken. He's always sworn it. You're brave enough, I know, Brett, but you're no match for him with a gun. He's got the advantage of cover, too. You'd be a dead man before you could get your finger on the trigger."

"Let me try, sir," Henshaw intervened once more. "If I could get as far as Burton did I might slip into the next cabin and hide for a few minutes. There'd be just a chance then of getting him unawares."

"Not a bad idea," the Chief Inspector acknowledged. "Try it, Henshaw."

The first part of the scheme succeeded well enough. Henshaw took off his boots on deck, and, moving swiftly and silently, reached the shelter of the next cabin to Matthew's, and noiselessly disappeared. There was a brief pause. Once or twice the little group of men—stern and unnaturally pale they seemed in the flickering light—saw the door tremble. Henshaw was evidently on the alert inside, ready, the moment Matthew gave any indication of his presence, to spring out.

"It's a great idea," the Chief Inspector whispered. "Henshaw is as strong as a lion, and quick, too. He might get him if he comes out again to parley."

THEY waited in agonized silence through minutes which seemed like hours. One or two of the crew had appeared and had been standing curiously around, but at the Chief Inspector's orders they had retired below. The deck was deserted, except where the seven men were crouching by the companion-way. Suddenly there was the sound of a muffled revolver-shot from the cabin into which Henshaw had disappeared. Henshaw himself staggered out a moment later, blood streaming down his face.

"He got me over the partition," he gasped. "I'm in."

He swayed helplessly and collapsed upon the floor. At that moment the door of the far cabin opened, and Matthew stood there in the full light. The foremost of the police, who was a brother-in-law of Henshaw, raised his gun, but again the Chief Inspector struck it down.

"Why waste time and your perfectly good policemen like this?" Matthew asked a little wearily. "You can starve me, perhaps, in a matter of four or five days, or you might get a quick shot in when I come out, it is true, otherwise you haven't a chance. I am waiting for Brett."

Then Brett committed the first act of insubordination of his official life. He slipped down the stairs before anyone could prevent him, and he walked along the carpeted way with his automatic in his right hand and a pair of handcuffs in his left.

"I'm coming, Matthew," he called out. "Get your wrists ready."

"Sensible little man," Matthew approved. "Be careful of that gun, though. It might go off the way you're swinging it about. This way, please."

"Brett, come back!" the Chief Inspector shouted.

Brett, however, was suffering from a sudden fit of deafness. It was perhaps, in his own mind, the moment of his life. He was scarcely conscious of the fact that his feet were touching the ground. He walked without fear, or any apparent consciousness of danger, and he followed Matthew into the little cabin without hesitation.

"Put up your hands!" he ordered, as soon as he had crossed the threshold.

"All in good time," the other replied, good-humouredly, "and for Heaven's sake put your gun away. Your business is to take me alive. You can't shoot me because you know perfectly well that I could have shot you coming along the passage. Sit

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down opposite me there," he invited, with a sudden change of tone. "I have something to say to you before we finish."

"I'll stand," Brett replied, firmly. "Get it over quickly."

"I suppose you're wondering," Matthew went on, "why I'm taking this so quietly. I'll tell you. I've never been defeated before, but I recognize defeat when it comes. Either I have been getting less clever lately or you more subtle. This time you have outmanœuvred me, although I thought I had covered every contingency. Excuse me."

His long arm shot out with incredible swiftness. He locked the door before Brett could stop him.

"A precautionary measure only," he explained. "I don't wish you to communicate with those others, you see, and I don't want one of them stealing down to break into our last few words together. Brett, do you know what that is?"

He pointed to a brown oak box, with the face of a clock, of the persistent ticking from which Brett had been conscious since his entrance into the room.

"It looks like a clock."

"It does indeed," Matthew agreed. "It has every appearance of being a clock. Yet, Brett, let me assure you that it is nothing of the sort. It is a class of article which has gone out of fashion a good deal, although they were used very effectually for time explosions during the war. That is the very newest form of infernal machine. Can you see the time by it, Mr. Brett? The light is a little in my eyes."

"It appears to be ten minutes to six."

"So near the hour!" Matthew murmured. "I had no idea. That little piece of mechanism, Brett—you can see the wires running down there—has been my plaything for some time. Its presence on board this ship is why I always determined that if at any time I should find myself cornered it should be here that I would face defeat. It also seemed to me to be a pleasant idea," he went on, "to share my last moments with as many of my persecutors as possible. You see I am not going to kill you, Mr. Brett, and you are not going to kill me, nor are you going to make any use of those very ugly handcuffs. I have been a criminal now for some twenty-two years," he concluded, reflectively, "and during all that time no handcuff has ever touched my wrist, no policeman's pudgy fingers have ever rested upon my arm. A good record, Brett. Forgive me!"

With another movement of amazing swiftness—it seemed that he must have been watching his opportunity all the time—he half sprang across the table, seized his visitor's arm, and wrenched the automatic from his hand. He laid it carefully upon the mantelpiece.

"Forgive me," he begged, apologetically. "I know, of course, that you wouldn't

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"You flatter me," Matthew murmured.

"Oh, chuck it!" Brett insisted, angrily. "I am tired of your cheap cynicism. Listen to me. The end of this matter is between us two, and us two only. Here I am. I'm not afraid."

He selected a cigarette from a box on the table, and lit it with steady fingers.

"You and I will sit opposite one another at this table," he continued, "and hear the clock strike six together. Only—just let me call out one word of warning to the others, and have them clear off. There's your crew, too."

Matthew shook his head.

"My crew had orders to go off duty at ten minutes to six," he confided. "Didn't you hear them clambering down the gangway just now? Let us sit opposite one another by all means, Mr. Brett, as we are doing now, but when we hear that clock strike—gracious, only a minute more!—I shall like to feel that our friends up there are getting the surprise of their lives. I could almost smile when I think of your pompous Chief Inspector, and as to his plain-clothes policemen, I hate the whole brood. You've never seen the effect of a high-powered bomb, I suppose? There won't be a stick left of the ship, and they won't be able to identify a single one of us. The Royal Palace jewels—they are all in that drawer, by the by—will probably descend in a charred shower somewhere about Ludgate Hill."

He sank into the opposite chair. He was nearest the door, and Brett realized with a pang that there was no earthly way of communicating with the men in the companion-way. His eyes strayed to the clock. The long hand was creeping on to the black line of six. There was a little whir.

"Our time has come, Brett," Matthew announced, smiling across at him. "Can you hear anything?"

The first note of the hour struck, and from somewhere down below came a curious whirring sound. Brett, with his arms folded, sat looking steadily across the table. He could see Matthew's face—nothing else in the world—the mocking lips, the clear eyes, with their splendid and yet inhuman light. The clock struck—one, two, three, four, five, six—once more the whirring, and then silence. Matthew rose to his feet, and his hands strayed towards the mantelpiece.

"My little friend," he said, "I congratulate you. You have saved your own life and the lives of a few of your associates. There is only one quality which appeals to me, and that is bravery. If you had flinched, you were a dead man. As it is, my best wishes!"

Brett's movement was the swiftest he had ever made, but he was too late. Matthew, with the cigarette still between his lips, held the gun to his temples and pulled the trigger. He collapsed without a word or a groan on to the table, and from there to the floor. Brett stood looking at him for a moment. Then he crossed the room and unlocked the door. . . .

When the little crowd of excited men rushed into the cabin, they found him on his knees by the side of the dead man. There was no exultation in his face when the Chief Inspector grasped him by his hand.

"Matthew cheated me after all, sir," he said, tonelessly.

THE Chief Inspector, welcoming Brett after his month's leave of absence, heard the news with dismay.

"But, my dear fellow," he protested, "I have some most interesting work waiting for you. You're a young man and very much in favour. To resign just at the beginning of your career seems absurd."

"There will never be another Matthew, sir," Brett replied, "and if there were, I am not at all sure that I should want to go after him. Besides, I've come to the conclusion that I should never make a first-class detective."

"You're a first-class fisherman," Lady Muriel murmured, "and you're much better on a horse than I ever dared to hope."

Absolom looked from one to the other.

"Where are you going to live, Brett?" he asked, suspiciously.

"In Ireland," was the half-dubious confession.

"Quite a good matchmaker, aren't you, Mr. Absolom?" Lady Muriel laughed.

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THE ALTAR OF HONOUR

By

ETHEL M. DELL

Illustrated by
HOWARD K. ELCOCK

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST INSTALMENT.

Her mother having met her death in a hunting accident, Charmaine, a lovely little golden-haired girl, was brought up in Ireland by her impoverished father and brutal stepsister, Griselda. At a Christmas party she met Rory ("Daredevil") Donovan, a merry-eyed naval cadet, and arranged next day to meet him on the seashore. That day saw the beginning of a childhood romance; but on Charmaine's return home Griselda punished her with a riding-switch for going out without permission and forbade her ever again to see Rory. The ugly Griselda had always hated her beautiful stepmother and revenged herself on Charmaine, who promised to grow up as great a beauty as her mother. Some years afterwards the family moved to an English hunting county; and one day Griselda sent for Charmaine, now seventeen, and told her that it had been decided to send her to stay in London during the Season with her other stepsister, Sylvia, married to Sir Bentleigh Merrion. Griselda had come to this decision in order to reduce household expenses and in the hope that Charmaine would find a husband and so rid them of her for ever.

CHAPTER III.

CINDERELLA.

"YOU'LL have to amuse yourself to a certain extent, my dear," was Sylvia Merrion's good-natured warning to Charmaine on the evening of her arrival at the luxurious flat in Mayfair in which she and her husband were domiciled for the season. "I'll give you as many treats as I can, but I can't be running round after you all the time."

"I like amusing myself," said Charmaine.

It was such a relief to be with someone who did not care how she spent her time, and Sylvia was as easy-going as Griselda was strict. Sylvia detailed her French maid, Marie, to see to her wardrobe and to keep an eye on her charge until she had begun to find her way about.

It took Marie just three weeks to turn the insignificant, unfashionable Charmaine into a being of such arresting and unusual beauty that neither of the former adjectives could ever with justice be applied to her again. And it was not so much a transformation that Marie in her subtlety effected, but a deft revelation of the loveliness already there.

Charmaine, entering her sister's drawing-room on a certain bright spring Sunday afternoon, attired in one of the simplest frocks of Marie's contriving, was greeted by an amazed stare from Sylvia, who at the moment was surrounded by guests.

For, as the girl entered the room with the sedate grace of one prepared to risk rather than challenge attention, Sylvia was completely taken by surprise.

Charmaine was exquisite — a fairy creature of unconscious allurement, perfect as a miniature in every detail, yet so completely natural as to shine like a woodland flower in a garden of exotics.

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"Good heavens!" said old Lady Cravenstowe, lifting her glasses. "Who in the world is this?"

"Don't run away again, Charmaine!" her stepsister said. "Come over here and be presented to Lady Cravenstowe!"

"My dear, what a dream!" said Lady Cravenstowe. "I've never seen anyone more like an angel in my life!"

"My little sister!" said Sylvia, drawing her forward. "She is just up from the country for a glimpse of London."

Lady Cravenstowe dropped her glasses and peered at Charmaine, finally taking her by the hand and patting her cheek. "Lucky London!" she remarked. "What is it they call you? Charmaine? A very suitable name!"

Charmaine's blush deepened.

"She isn't eighteen yet," said Sylvia, coming to her aid. "She hasn't had time to do very much."

"What! Just left school?" questioned Lady Cravenstowe. "What a glorious age, to be sure! And what do you think of London, young lady? Is it as amusing as the country?"

'Oh, much more!" said Charmaine, low-voiced but fervent. "I love London, though of course I love the country too."

A man, standing beside Lady Cravenstowe, laughed. "Don't you find London very wicked?" he said.

"Be quiet, Robert!" commanded Lady Cravenstowe. "She doesn't know what wickedness means, and you're not to tell her. This is Sir Robert Blakeley, my dear. I may as well make you acquainted with him at once, as he is sure to achieve it somehow."

Charmaine found herself shaking hands with a cheery little man whose black eyes smiled quizzically upon her from behind his eyeglass. There was admiration as well as merriment in his smile, and a thrill of pleasure went through her.

"We're not all as wicked as Lady Cravenstowe would have you believe," he assured her, "and I personally have no knowledge whatever of the particular vice to which she refers. It takes a woman of brains to invent anything like original sin nowadays."

A tall girl, very beautifully dressed, standing by laughed scoffingly. "My dear man, there's no such thing," she said. "And I don't believe there ever was. Goodness is the only original thing left."

"In that case," said Sir Robert, with his eye upon Charmaine, "it behoves us to make the most of it when we meet it. Come and sit down and tell us what you do in the country!"

"I don't really know what I do," said Charmaine, and she threw an instinctive glance around her as if in search of some means of escape.

"Oh, don't!" implored Sir Robert. "Don't go! Tell us some more! Is your name Cinderella by any chance?"

"Robert!" here broke in Lady Cravenstowe authoritatively. "You are not behaving properly. Linda, I wish you'd look after him and keep him in order."

"I?" said the tall girl contemptuously. "Oh, I'd rather be excused, if you don't mind. He's no responsibility of mine."

Charmaine, noting the metallic hardness of her voice, wondered what Sir Robert had done to annoy her. She herself, though the object of his amusement, was not annoyed, only embarrassed.

But Lady Cravenstowe had decided apparently to take her under her own ample protection.

"Don't take any notice of these scatterbrains!" she said. "They are all foolish and frivolous, Sir Robert Blakeley especially. Perhaps I had better tell you that he is called Baba Blacksheep by all who know him best.

"Now listen, my dear! I want you to come and have luncheon with me tomorrow, quite informally. Of course I shall ask your sister too, but if she has an engagement, will you be very brave and come alone?"

"Oh, yes," said Charmaine. "I should simply love it."

She spoke straight from her heart. This one brief experience of the unknown world of society was to her like a glimpse of fairyland, and she longed intensely to see more.

"Very well, my dear, then that is settled," said Lady Cravenstowe. "Now I will speak to your sister."

WHEN everyone was gone, Sylvia called her little sister to her for the first time since her arrival.

"Well, Charmaine," she said, "I congratulate you—and I suppose I ought to congratulate Marie also for turning you out so well. She certainly has surpassed herself, and I must say I had no idea you would be so well worth while. You have made a great impression on old Lady Cravenstowe. She seems to want to take you under her wing altogether. She'll probably end by wanting to present you."

"Oh, Sylvia!" said Charmaine, quivering at the thought. "You don't think that really?"

Sylvia laughed. "I can't say. More wonderful things have happened. She is a lady of considerable influence, and you are very lucky to have attracted her attention. But you will have to go carefully with her,

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to-morrow," Sylvia said. "I couldn't go, so the invitation was extended to her alone."

Sir Bentleigh beamed at the news. "Hullo! That looks like business! Everyone knows that she is on the look-out for a suitable partner for that aristocratic nephew of hers, young Conister. What are you frowning at, Sylvia? Girls are not such humbugs nowadays as to pretend to be shocked at the idea of marriage."

"No, but it's a pity to count one's chickens before they're hatched," said Sylvia. "And I can't believe that Charlotte would ever have any attraction for men—not, anyhow, men who are in a position to choose stylish girls like Linda Kennedy."

"Oh, that girl is too sophisticated!" declared her husband. "Besides, she's always about with that Baba Blacksheep, so who's likely to run after her?"

"I believe she is fond of him," said Sylvia. "But goodness knows! They're a funny crowd. Don't you get too intimate with him, Charlotte! Hullo! Where are you?"

Charmaine was at the door. She looked back deprecatingly. "I didn't think you wanted me. I was just going to tell Marie all about it—and about to-morrow."

"All right, country-mouse, run along!" said her brother-in-law indulgently.

Charmaine went with hot cheeks, but with feet that scampered in tune to the amazing and unexpected leaping of her heart. For the first time the dark dread of an enforced return to Griselda which had always hitherto overhung her was lifted, and she saw golden vistas of possibilities such as she had never envisaged before.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRINCE.

THE May sunshine was streaming upon an enchanted world when Charmaine set forth to pay her visit in Park Lane on the following day. She went in her brother-in-law's car, which had previously deposited Sylvia at the Ritz, and the lonely grandeur of the brief journey filled her with a sort of joyful trepidation. She was desperately nervous, but she would not have missed the adventure for worlds.

When the tall front-door swung open, and she was confronted by a tall footman of imposing presence, she could hardly find sufficient voice to make her request for Lady Cravenstowe audible. But he swept the door wide for her as though she had been a princess, and she entered, still murmuring inarticulately.

She went up a shallow, thickly-carpeted staircase, following the lordly footman, and in response to his lofty gesture entered a room of palatial dimensions with a high painted ceiling and walls of cream and gold. Here her guide left her with a request to be seated which did not even penetrate her consciousness. She remained standing in the middle of the great apartment, feeling as if she were in a strangely-familiar dream.

In a far corner she caught a glimpse of green mingled with exquisite colour which drew her as by a spell. Here was a conservatory arranged like a grotto, with a tinkling fountain that played over a marble pool of gold-fish, with a great bank of ferns behind it and myriads of rare flowers around.

The heavy fragrance of the place was like incense. She paused at the entrance, longing to enter, yet half afraid.

All her life she had had a passion for flowers, and in this enchanted spot was some wandering scent that reminded her vividly—vividly—of a certain tiny conservatory where once she had sat and wept in lonely desolation, and someone had come to her—someone with an amazing warmth of vitality—and had charmed her tears away. Often still in dreams that memory was with her, though she had long abandoned all hope of meeting that beloved hero of hers again. He had flashed into her life and flashed out again, nor had she ever managed to recall his surname—which possibly indeed she had never heard. She treasured him in her heart as Rory Daredevil, and she had never associated any other name with him. Where he was now—whither he had gone after that brief golden friendship—she knew not, and in that abject submission to which she had been schooled she accepted her ignorance with resignation.

Several seconds must have elapsed before she realized that the wandering scent which so enthralled her came from a mass of dark heliotrope in one corner, and she moved towards it in obedience to a blind longing which would not be denied. She reached it, bent above it; then, as the scent rose all about her, she knelt and, gathering a great head of the flower into her two hands, she softly kissed it.

The next moment, at a sound behind her, she sprang to her feet, scarlet with confusion, to meet the eyes of a stranger.

They were quite kindly eyes, but Charmaine was too startled and dismayed to notice that. She stood quivering and downcast, as one caught in a guilty act.

He spoke at once, easily and with a most reassuring friendliness. "I say, are you fond of flowers? They are jolly, aren't they? I'm Basil Conister. I've been sent down to amuse you till my aunt comes."

She looked up at him apologetically.

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"I'm afraid I ought not to have come in here," she murmured.

"Why not?" he said. "I should say to look at you that it's the one place you really ought to be in. But, of course, I'm no judge."

He smiled at her, and she gave him a very shy smile of gratitude in return.

"It's Miss Audley, isn't it?" he said, holding out his hand. "That's all right," as she gave hers timidly in return. "Now we know each other. What's that flower you like so much? Why, it's cherry-pie! Have a bit of it!"

He moved forward—a tall, loose-knit figure of athletic build—and gathered a beautiful bloom from her favourite flower.

"Oh, thank you!" said Charmaine. "How lovely!"

"Have a bit of maidenhair, too!" he suggested. "Here's a bit! And one of those Malmaison carnations wouldn't come amiss, would it?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Charmaine. "Do you think I ought?"

And then, because his eyes were so frank and kindly, she found her shyness slipping from her again, and she took his flowers without further hesitation.

There was nothing in the least formidable about him. She liked his eyes because they were so open and honest. The rest of his face did not impress her very particularly. It was quite good-looking in a simple, straightforward fashion, but it was not the kind of face that one remembered with any great vividness afterwards. The principal thing that struck her was its complete friendliness. Here was someone of whom she did not feel she could ever be afraid. And yet he was by no means insignificant. She thought there was something rather fine and knightly about his bearing. She decided afterwards that he was the sort of person who did not need to make an impression. He bore the stamp of good breeding in every line—a free birthright of which he was not even conscious.

SOMEHOW it seemed to be perfectly natural to be joking with him and offering him a flower before their acquaintanceship was five minutes old. He had the supreme gift of making everything seem easy, or was it something within herself that responded to a similar quality in him—a bond of sympathy which could not but flourish between them from the outset?

"You know what'll happen to it, don't you?" he said as, emboldened by his semi-coaxing attitude, she consented to insert a sprig she had gathered into his buttonhole.

"What will happen to it?" she asked, with eyes of deep innocence raised to his.

He smiled down at her, his look half-reverent, half-tender. "I shall press it in my Prayer Book, of course, and keep it for ever and ever."

"Shall you?" said Charmaine, momentarily puzzled; and then, with a hint of humour which surprised herself, "Is that what you use your Prayer Book for?"

He laughed. "*Touché, Mademoiselle!* And I deserved it. But I protest—my Prayer Book is not a museum of that description. Your gift will reign alone."

"It isn't really a gift," said Charmaine, "because it wasn't mine to give."

"Well, it was jolly nice of you to think of it, anyway," he declared. "Come and look at the gold-fish! By Jove! They get fatter every day. Put your hand in and see if you can catch one!"

"I'm sure they wouldn't like to be caught," said Charmaine.

Nevertheless, it was amusing to sit on the edge of the marble pool with him and make abortive attempts to waylay the darting fish. They became in fact so uproarious over this occupation that Lady Cravenstowe's entrance was unheard by either of them, and not till her laughter joined theirs were they aware of her presence.

"You mischievous infants!" she exclaimed, as they started and looked up. "If you don't both of you deserve to be sent straight to the nursery! Look at you! Simply drenched!"

"Oh, no! We're all right," her nephew assured her, though he looked for the moment slightly embarrassed. "We haven't done any harm."

"Well, my dear," said Lady Cravenstowe, "come along and have some lunch! I must apologize for not being here to receive you. I was detained by a stupid lawyer man who came to talk business."

She smiled appreciatively at Charmaine and drew her hand through her arm to lead her from the room.

It was a cheery little luncheon-party, and before it was over she felt that it was not a party at all, but that she actually belonged to this atmosphere of geniality which so short a time before she had feared to enter. She thought Basil Conister was quite the nicest man she had ever met. His gentleness and his complete absence of subtlety appealed to her very strongly. She also discovered that he was a lover of the country, and this instantly established a bond between them, though he shook his head when she confessed with some shame that she was too nervous to ride.

"That means you haven't been taught properly," he said. "You wouldn't be nervous if I had the teaching of you."

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And very curiously in her heart she agreed with him.

Lady Cravenstowe did so audibly. "Ah, yes! If you had the teaching of her on those lovely slopes of Culverley! There isn't a girl living who wouldn't enjoy that."

"Where is Culverley?" Charmaine asked.

It was Basil who answered her. "It's my cousin's place—one of the old family inheritances of England, the sort of place you would love."

"I should think she would!" said Lady Cravenstowe warmly. "It's a dream of a place, and has been owned by the Conisters for ages. I was a Conister, you know. I was born there. Some day I shall get Hugh to let me take you down there for a visit. Poor old Hugh! He is the present Lord Conister. He injured his spine in a motoring accident and is quite helpless. There is nothing to be done. They say the marvel is that he is still alive—if you can call it living! I am very fond of him."

"I would love to go," said Charmaine, "if you think he wouldn't mind."

"Yes, you would like him," said Basil. "You might stand in awe of him a little at first, but you would soon get over it. He is quite one of the best."

"All the Conisters are," said Lady Cravenstowe humorously. "I believe we date back to the Knights of the Round Table, and they were the essence of good form, as everybody knows."

"Those were good old days," said Basil, "and chivalry was an article worth having."

"But isn't there any left?" asked Charmaine.

Basil laughed a little. "Well, yes, I suppose so. Just here and there! But it isn't so fashionable as it used to be."

"Does it matter about being fashionable?" she asked rather timidly.

He looked straight at her with his kindly eyes. "Not to anyone like you," he said. "I should think you belong to the happy few who can afford to be—just themselves, Miss Audley."

She flushed, but more from pleasure than embarrassment.

"Oh, do call me Charmaine!" she said. "I like it so much better."

"So do I," he said promptly. "But I didn't know I might."

"I don't think I should let him if I were you, dear," said Lady Cravenstowe judicially, "until you know each other a little better."

They became so uproarious over this entrance was unheard

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occupation that Lady Cravenstowe's by either of them.

"I should like to wring his neck for him," said Basil.

"Oh, why?" said Charmaine, looking startled. "It doesn't really matter, does it?"

"Not if I may call you Cinderella, too."

She turned to Lady Cravenstowe with a childish gesture of coaxing. "May he?" she pleaded.

"And what are you going to call him?" said Lady Cravenstowe, a hint of warning in her voice, despite the banter.

"Oh, I am the prince, of course," said Basil, lightly coming to the rescue. "I shall be calling on you with a glass slipper one of these days."

She turned back to him with a merry laugh. "I hope it'll fit!" she said.

Something in his smiling eyes confused her. She made a shy movement of withdrawal, and in the same moment Lady Cravenstowe rose from the table.

"I'm sure I hope it will," she said. "If I am to be the fairy godmother, I will see that it does."

She put her arm round Charmaine with the words, and there was that in the motherly touch which went straight to the girl's lonely heart. She remembered it afterwards with a deep sense of comfort. Whatever happened, she was sure that Lady Cravenstowe would be her guide and friend.

"Oh, I'm sorry," murmured Charmaine humbly. "I didn't think it mattered what anybody called me. You let Sir Robert Blakeley call me Cinderella yesterday."

"I have no authority over him," said Lady Cravenstowe, with a smile towards her nephew.

"Whereas," explained Basil with an answering smile, "she rules me with a rod of iron. But I'm hanged if that Blakeley fellow is going to steal a march on me. If he is allowed to call you Cinderella——"

"He isn't!" said Charmaine hastily. "He just did, that's all."

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CHAPTER V.

BABA BLACKSHEEP.

IT deprived the day's happenings of some of the glamour to be closely cross-questioned by Sylvia on her return, but Charmaine endured the inquisition with her customary submission. The questions asked of her had little meaning until it dawned upon her that most of Sylvia's interest was concentrated upon Basil Conister's attitude towards herself, and then a sense of impotent shame descended upon Charmaine and she became almost monosyllabic in her replies.

"Well, I hope you've made a good impression," said Sylvia at length, "but if you were as uncommunicative with them as you are with me, I should think they must have put you down as half-imbecile. I dare say you're tired, though," she added more kindly, as Charmaine's colour rose. "It's been a new experience, and no doubt you'll soon learn to be brighter. Run along now and amuse yourself! You can go in the Park with Marie after tea, if you like. I shall be out."

Charmaine departed thankfully, but when tea was over she did not at once go out with Marie. She shut herself into her room and lay on her bed, gathering her dreams closely about her.

It was impossible not to know the meaning of Sylvia's very candid remarks, impossible to shut her eyes to the glaring evidence all around her that she was here for disposal, just as an animal was in a market for sale. The thought troubled her, for it seemed as if in some fashion she were trying to assume a position to which she had no right. And yet it was not her fault. Griselda had sent her here. Griselda wanted to be rid of her. And how urgently, how desperately, she desired to escape from Griselda, never, never to return, only her own quivering heart knew. But this also was a disquieting thought, placing a sordid aspect upon everything. She put it from her with a sense of degradation. It was horrible to let this wonderful shining dream that had come to her be sullied thus.

In a glass close to her was the spray of flowers that Basil Conister had gathered for her. She turned and drew it softly to her, filling her whole soul with its fragrance. What a perfect day it had been, and how very kind he had been to her! He was probably kind to everyone, she reflected, a little wistfully. It was one of the guiding principles of that enchanted world which seemed so like home to her. That was the world to which Rory had belonged—her adored Rory.

Again the scent of the flowers came to her overwhelmingly, and upon a tender impulse she lifted them out of their glass and laid them all dripping upon her pillow. She wondered if he had put that sprig of heliotrope into his Prayer Book yet, and recalled his nice, blue-grey eyes as he had declared his intention of doing so. Again their sincerity appealed to the sincerity within herself, and she coupled with it his kindness and his chivalry. No wonder his aunt was fond of him!

SHE began to wonder when she would see them again, and her heart gave a little flutter of excitement. She was sure that he would come to her, wherever it was—single her out. Already he liked her enough for that. She did not—could not—doubt it. With all her inexperience she knew beyond all question that he did not treat other girls of his acquaintance as he had treated her. He had called himself the prince, had said that he would call upon her. Suddenly she covered her face with her two trembling hands and lay palpitating. Oh, if he really did call — would she be pleased? — would she be frightened?

No, not frightened of course! He was far too kind, too friendly, for that. But she felt she ought to tell him—in case he didn't know—that she had been sent up to market so that someone might come and buy her and take her away. It would be so dreadful, so wrong, if he didn't understand.

There came a knock at her door and Marie's voice without.

"Mademoiselle, there is a gentleman on the telephone asking for you. Will you come and speak to him?"

Charmaine sprang up. "A gentleman! Oh, Marie, who?"

"He did not give his name," said Marie. "He said he would tell it you himself. Shall I go and ask, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Charmaine. "Wait a minute! I'll come."

She smoothed her hair hastily and went to the door.

Marie, standing outside, gave her a critical look. "Mademoiselle!" she said, reproachfully. "Have you not a *négligée?* Must you lie down in your new frock?"

"Oh, I'm sorry! I forgot," said Charmaine. She put her hands to her hot cheeks as if to ward off Marie's scrutiny. "I really did forget," she said, apologetically.

Marie's severity passed. "*Là, là!*" she said, with a shrug. "The poor Marie will have to iron it, that is all."

"I'll iron it," said Charmaine. "But I must go now, mustn't I?"

"Myself, I would not go," said Marie; but since Charmaine was already beyond

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earshot of her advice she decided to follow her to the telephone.

Charmaine was already speaking into it in propitiatory tones. "Hullo! I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting. Who is it, please?"

A cheery voice answered her. "Hullo, Cinderella! Is that you? I say, are you doing anything this evening?"

"Oh, no!" said Charmaine. "That is, I mean—I don't think of going out anywhere."

"That's all right. Think again!" laughed back the voice. "I shall be at the door in two minutes to take you out for a run in my little Hop-o'-My-Thumb. So tie your scalp on tight, for she's hot stuff!"

The telephone clicked, and Charmaine looked up slightly dazed.

"That—that must be Sir Robert Blakeley," she said, as she hung up the receiver. "He's coming round to take me out in his car. I hadn't time to say No."

She spoke a little dubiously, as if she expected Marie to veto the project; but Marie, after swift consideration, decided that it was not in her province to interfere.

"Mademoiselle will need her warm coat," she observed practically.

And Charmaine, feeling that that settled it, acquiesced without further scruple. She had had no chance to refuse, and it would be rude to let him come for her in vain.

She dressed hastily, therefore, with Marie's aid, and when the roar of Sir Robert Blakeley's sports car broke upon the calm of the square she was already on her way to the ground floor. They met in the hall.

"By Jove!" he said. "That's quick work! How topping you look!"

She faced his open admiration with a quiver that was half of shyness and half of delight. Was she really as pretty as everyone declared?

"By Jove!" he said again, almost involuntarily. "You really are a peach, if I may be allowed to say so."

She laughed—that gay, thrilling laugh of hers which had come into existence only during the past few days and which was somehow like a bird's song in its complete spontaneity and joy.

"I expect you can say what you like, can't you?" she said.

"Can I?" said Sir Robert. "Can I do what I like, too?"

But even Charmaine realized that the situation required some boundaries. Perhaps the persistent adulation of his eyes conveyed a warning, unawakened as yet though she was.

"Oh, well," she said, "I don't suppose anybody can do quite that, can they?"

There was no door to the car; Charmaine stepped over the side and slid down into its interior, finding herself almost in a horizontal position under the dashboard. Sir Robert fitted himself in beside her, and in a moment they were in uproarious motion.

IT seemed scarcely more than a few minutes ere they were speeding along a wide road between green fields that seemed to stretch into infinity. The rushing air nearly took her breath away, but it had an invigorating quality that was like a stimulant. She drew it gasping into her lungs, well-nigh forgetting the man beside her in the delight of rapid motion.

He did not speak to her until forced to slacken at a cross-roads, and then his voice held a laughing challenge.

"Well, Cinderella! Not wishing yourself back at home yet?"

She wished for some reason unaccountable that he would not call her Cinderella, but felt it would be the height of ungraciousness to tell him so. She gave him a quick smile of gratitude instead.

"I'm just loving it!" she said.

"Well, we'll get off this main road, anyhow," he laughed. "I'm for pulling up under a tree for a rest."

Her mood changed instantly. "Oh, of course! You're tired!" she said. "How selfish of me not to think of that!"

"No, I'm not specially tired," he said. "We'll go on again presently. What time have you got to be back?"

"Oh, any time!" said Charmaine. "Sylvia will be out to dinner, so it doesn't matter."

"What!" He turned on her keenly. "You'll be quite alone?"

"Yes, but I don't mind," she said. "Oh, there's a lovely lane! Let's go up there!"

He turned the car obligingly and they found themselves in a narrow by-road laden with the scents of spring, and high hedges bursting into greenness on each side.

"Isn't it lovely?" said Charmaine.

"Lovely!" said Sir Robert.

And then to her complete astonishment he stopped the car, leaned deliberately over her, and kissed her on the lips.

"There!" he said. "I've been aching to do that ever since we started."

"Oh!" gasped Charmaine, divided between amazement and distress.

He smiled down at her, his face still close to hers. "It's all right, little girl," he said. "It just means I'm fond of you, that's all. You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I do!" faltered Charmaine, bewildered and unhappy. "I don't like

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it. It isn't right. Please don't ever do it again!"

"Mustn't I?" he said. "But why not? There's no harm in a kiss, is there? You're such a kid, too. I should think everyone kisses you when they get the chance, don't they?"

"No!" said Charmaine. "No! No one ever does! And I don't like it. Please—please don't do it again!"

"All right!" he laughed. "Not till next time! I'll have a cigarette, shall I, to keep me good? You have one, too!"

"No, thank you," said Charmaine. "I think—I think I'd like to go home now, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "You're not in a rage, are you? What's the matter? Most girls like it. After all, I was only being friendly."

She turned her face away from him, feeling herself on the verge of tears. "I'm not like—most girls," she said, in a choked voice. "Will you please take me back?"

"Why, of course if you wish it," he said. "But really, you know, you're a bit unreasonable to take offence like this."

"I'm not—offended," said Charmaine, struggling with herself. "It isn't that. You've been very kind. Only—only—I don't like it any more."

"Don't like me any more, do you mean?" he said.

The limitations of the car made close proximity inevitable, but Charmaine shrank into her corner like a frightened mouse. "It isn't that!" she repeated, in growing agitation. "Only—I see now—you're one of—the flighty ones. I'm so sorry. I ought to have known before."

He began to laugh, albeit somewhat ruefully. "Call me a cad at once and have done with it!" he said. "I say, I'm awfully sorry. Don't look so cut up! I didn't mean to upset you, honour bright. Won't you forgive me?"

She shook her head, refusing to look at him. "It's me that's in the wrong, not you!" she explained, rather incoherently. "It was all my fault for coming. I do wish I hadn't." Repressed tears made her voice quiver. "But it's no good wishing. It's too late. Please, Sir Robert, take me home now!"

"Call me Baba like the rest," he said, persuasively. "And, I say, why is it too late? You're not maimed for life just because a wicked man stole a kiss, you know. You'll get over it. Why—let me look at you—it doesn't show in the least even now, I assure you."

"But you'll take me back again now, won't you?" persisted Charmaine, feeling that this false step she had taken must be instantly retraced lest the spell should be broken.

He looked at her quizzically. "Oh, yes, I'll take you back, but give me five minutes to pull myself together! It's been rather a shock, you know. Have you been brought up in a convent by any chance?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no!"

"Then why are you so easily shocked?" he questioned, still eyeing her askance as he lighted his cigarette.

Charmaine hesitated. Now that the crisis was past she was decidedly more at her ease with him, but she did not feel drawn towards making him her confidant.

"I really don't know," she said after consideration. "But I don't like making mistakes, and—well, I suppose I've been brought up rather strictly."

"Ye gods! I should think so!" he agreed. "It doesn't do to take anything too seriously, in my opinion," he continued after a moment. "Enjoy life while you can is my maxim."

"I see," said Charmaine gravely. "May we start back now?"

He heaved a sigh of resignation and prepared to obey. "What a tyrant you are!" he said. "But I'll tell you one thing, Cinderella. You'll never enjoy anything while you're such a prude. My advice to you is, make the most of your time! You won't always be young and lovely, you know."

"Am I lovely?" said Charmaine, wonderingly. "Are you sure?"

"You don't suppose I should want to kiss anyone that wasn't, do you?" asked Baba Blacksheep with a sidelong smile.

"Oh!" said Charmaine rather abruptly, as if scared by the thought.

She did not ask him any further questions throughout the run home, but sat in silence, deeply pondering.

CHAPTER VI.

ADVICE.

"MY dear," said Sylvia, "here is Lady Cravenstowe writing to know if she may borrow you, as she puts it, for a dance at Mrs. Granard's on the tenth. Mrs. Granard is her sister-in-law. It's a young people's affair, and she offers to chaperon you and put you up for the night. Would you like it?"

Like it! Charmaine's heart leapt at the bare idea. "Oh, how good she is!" she said.

"It's rather short notice—only three days," said Sylvia.

"But, Sylvia"—Charmaine's face suddenly clouded—"I can't dance properly. Does that matter?"

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and in a moment the warm colour flooded her young face.

"Oh, Sylvia, do you think I shall do?" she said.

"Are you ready?" said Sylvia, coming forward; and then reaching her she broke into a good-humoured laugh. "Well, this is a transformation of the country mouse! Yes, my dear, I think you will do. In fact, I think you will easily be the belle of the ball. You are extraordinarily like your mother."

"Oh, am I?" Charmaine's eyes shone with delight. "She—she was so very beautiful," she murmured.

"Well, mind you have a good time!" were Sylvia's parting words. "And don't fall to the first comer! Remember to treat yourself as if you were somebody, and other people will do the same."

Charmaine pondered this advice during her brief interval of solitude in the car while she was being transported to Lady Cravenstowe's house, and decided that she must try to follow it. She rather wished that Sylvia had suggested it to her before. It might have helped her in her dealings with Sir Robert Blakeley. However, it was not too late to begin, and she was firmly determined that he at least should for the future be kept firmly at a distance.

She was met on the threshold of her boudoir by Lady Cravenstowe herself, regal in black velvet and pearls, who drew her into the room with a warm smile of welcome and kissed her.

"You are wearing white!" she said. "I am so glad, child. I wanted you in white. Come and sit down for a few minutes and tell me a little about yourself!"

She drew her down beside her on a settee and held her hand in hers.

"But I haven't anything to tell," said Charmaine humbly. "I've never been anywhere or done anything."

"What was your mother's name, dear?" asked Lady Cravenstowe. "You remind me so of a girl I used to know in my early married days in India."

"Oh!" breathed Charmaine. "Could it have been my mother? She was in India once. She met my father there."

"What was her name, dear?" repeated Lady Cravenstowe.

"Verena Maynard," said Charmaine, softly. "My name is Maynard, too—Charlotte Maynard. My mother was killed in the hunting field."

"Verena Maynard!" Meditatively Lady Cravenstowe repeated the name. "Yes, that was the girl I knew. I remember the name now. She was ten years younger than I—very lively and fascinating. She had all the men at her feet, I remember; but the one she really cared for was married. I never saw your father. My husband and I left India before she was married. I was never very intimate with her." She paused. "And she was killed in a hunting accident, you say. How long ago was that?"

"Five years," said Charmaine.

"Poor child!" said Lady Cravenstowe gently. "Yes, you are like her, very like her. Only you lack her vivacity. She was all a-sparkle with life. But you—you, my dear, don't yet know even what it means to live."

"I should like to know," murmured Charmaine shyly.

Lady Cravenstowe smiled at her. "You soon will, dear. But I want you to learn in the right way. So much depends on that. But you needn't be frightened." She squeezed her hand again reassuringly. "I am going to take care of you as far as I can. Tell me, you feel quite happy with my nephew Basil, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Charmaine, colouring deeply. "I like him very much."

"That's right," said Lady Cravenstowe warmly. "You need never be afraid of him. He is one of the right sort. But go carefully with the others, dear! Remember, it is better to move slowly in all things than to have to retrace your steps afterwards."

CHARMAINE understood this counsel far better than her counsellor realized, and whispered in confusion that she would certainly follow her advice.

Lady Cravenstowe laughed. "Well, well, we will go down and have some dinner, and then you shall have your first dance. Don't be nervous, because I shall be there all the time, and I shall keep you under my eye and bring you back when I think you have had enough."

"You are good to me," said Charmaine; and then, very shyly: "Will—your nephew—be there?"

"Basil? Oh, yes, he'll be there." Lady Cravenstowe patted her arm. "And no doubt he will ask you to dance. You may dance with him as often as you like—but not with the others. Don't give more than one at a time to any of them, and come to me in between the dances—that is, unless you are with Basil. It sounds a little strict, doesn't it, but you are so young and inexperienced that I feel I must take care of you."

"It's lovely to be taken care of like that," said Charmaine.

And then very suddenly, moved by an impulse that was stronger than her shyness, she carried the kindly hand that caressed her to her lips.

"Oh, thank you," she said, with a queer little gasping sob, "thank you—thank you!"

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"Funny child!" said Lady Cravenstowe, surprised and touched. "After all, why shouldn't you have a good time like the rest?"

A question to which Charmaine could find no reply! Such a point of view had never even occurred to her before.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REQUEST.

WHEN Charmaine entered the dining-room with her hostess, Basil Conister was waiting for them, and he came forward to meet her with a kindly smile.

"What a shame of my aunt to monopolize you!" he said. "I've been waiting in the drawing-room in the hope that you would join me in another shot at the gold-fish."

She laughed with him, and everything became at once easy and natural.

"We have something more important than gold-fish to think of to-night," said Lady Cravenstowe. "She is going to her first dance, and it is a very great occasion."

"It isn't—quite—my first," said Charmaine, with slight hesitation. "I went to one other a long time ago, when I was a child, over in Ireland."

"Only one?" said Basil.

"Yes, only one," she answered. "But I've been having dancing lessons for the last three days, so I hope I sha'n't be too stupid."

"Will you dance with me first?" he asked.

She flushed with pleasure. "I should love to," she said. "But you won't mind, will you, if I'm not very good?"

"I don't suppose I shall even know," he said.

"It is more of a duty than a pleasure with him," explained Lady Cravenstowe. "He is too lazy to learn to dance properly."

"Oh, I don't deserve that," he protested. "Too busy is really what you mean. Looking after poor old Hugh's show is practically a whole-time job, and there is very little over for frivolities. By the way, I've had a letter from him this evening, and he wants me to go back at the end of this week. He seems to think old Busby is making a hash of things."

"Oh, you can't go so soon!" exclaimed Lady Cravenstowe. "It really isn't fair. And you'll never come up again when once you get down there. Write and tell him you can't! Or let me!"

Basil shook his head. "It isn't fair to the old chap. He's so helpless, and he worries. Busby's rather an ass, you know. He always wants to rush things when I'm not there, just to demonstrate his efficiency. And dear old Hugh doesn't like being rushed. He also pays me the compliment of saying that he has more faith in my judgment than Busby's."

"Well, that's gratifying, anyway," commented Lady Cravenstowe, but her brow was slightly ruffled notwithstanding. "Still, I think he might allow you a little holiday sometimes. You are so frightfully patient and persevering that he is inclined to take advantage."

"No, no!" Basil said. "There's nothing selfish about old Hugh. He's much too large-minded for that. But he has the welfare of Culverley so much at heart, and there's no doubt about it that this new railway line has got to be watched very carefully or the place will be ruined."

"Oh, the railway!" said Lady Cravenstowe. "Yes, you're right. They can't be left to take their own way over that. Busby certainly can't be trusted in a matter of that sort. But I should have thought once the main plan had been approved they could hardly make any serious mistakes."

"I think I ought to be on the spot," Basil said. "Anyhow, I ought not to be away for any length of time. I promised Hugh I'd go back the moment he began to feel he wanted me."

"How very like you!" said his aunt with a smile. "And you'll keep your word, *coûte que coûte*. Well, we have got two more days, so we must make the most of them." She turned to Charmaine. "I told you about Culverley, didn't I? They are making a branch-line to Bentbridge through part of the park. It will be a deep cutting and is a long way from the house itself; but my nephew Hugh—Lord Conister, you know—is very anxious lest it should in any way detract from the beauties of the place. And Busby the bailiff, though very good in the ordinary way, is not too helpful in emergencies. And poor Hugh has come to lean upon Basil so much that he can scarcely bear to be without him. I think it's a pity myself."

"You'll have to come down to us," said Basil. "You said you would."

Lady Cravenstowe sighed. "I suppose I shall. But it will upset all my plans." Her look rested upon Charmaine for a moment or two. "Such a pity!" she said.

"Can't be helped," said Basil cheerily. "Poor old Hugh mustn't be left in the lurch. And as far as I personally am concerned, I'd sooner be at Culverley than anywhere else on earth."

"Oh, you!" said his aunt, with good-humoured disdain. "That's just the worst of it. You'll go and bury yourself in the country till all your best years are gone, and then when you're getting old and senile you'll complain that nobody loves you."

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Basil broke into a hearty laugh. "I say, that is a pathetic picture!" He turned to Charmaine. "I must try and avoid that at all costs, mustn't I?"

She tried to laugh with him, but her eyes were wistful. "I don't see how anyone is to avoid it who lives in the country all the time," she said.

"There now! She sides with me!" declared her hostess approvingly. "She is perfectly right, Basil. You are completely buried down there, with poor Hugh quite unable to do any entertaining. I don't know really how you can bear it, but I suppose——"

"It is my nature to," suggested Basil. "Well, do you know, I think I agree with you. I may be getting middle-aged before my time, but a quiet country life suits me, and there's no getting away from it. Now don't you think we've discussed me enough? Such a dull subject, isn't it?" Again he appealed to Charmaine.

"I think we ought to be quick," said Lady Cravenstowe. "I promised Eva we would arrive in good time."

"All right," he said easily. "We mustn't upset Mrs. Granard whatever happens. That would be a terrible affair."

He smiled at Charmaine with the words, and she smiled back, feeling that no situation would seem too formidable with him beside her. He had the comfortable solidity of one accustomed to hold his own without effort. Though neither assertive nor dominant, he somehow gave the impression of being a man who would not lightly be turned aside from any definite project. And she liked him for it. It seemed to denote a strength of character which at first sight was not apparent.

THE rest of the meal passed quickly with careless talk and laughter, and when they rose from the table Charmaine had it in her heart to wish that the evening could have been spent thus, without any further entertainment. For her dread of strangers, though becoming less acute, was still sufficiently strong to make her shrink from the ordeal of a crowd.

But the comforting presence of her hostess had a reassuring effect upon her, and as she put on her wrap in the little room leading out of Lady Cravenstowe's own bedroom in which she was to sleep, she consoled herself with the thought that, whatever happened, she would return thither that night. With a heart beating hard with excitement, she wondered what would happen in the interval, tried for a few moments to picture the dancers with whom she was so soon to mingle, but succeeded in seeing only one face—a boyish face with daring Irish eyes that laughed into her own.

She sighed and put the vision tenderly away. It was only in her dreams that she could ever hope to see it again.

She joined Lady Cravenstowe, who gave her a smile of most satisfying appreciation, and drew her to the head of the stairs, where she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten something and turned back to fetch it.

"You go on, dear! Tell Basil I'm coming! I sha'n't be a moment," she said.

And Charmaine went on slowly down the wide stairs, the white fur on her cloak surrounding her golden head like a nimbus, her blue eyes rapt and a little sad.

As she neared the foot she became aware of Basil Conister in the hall below, waiting for her, and came back to the present with a smile. But as her look met his, a strange confusion seized her.

"Don't look so shy!" he said. "You're going to have the time of your life."

"Am I?" said Charmaine.

"Of course you are!" he said. "You'll be snowed under with partners. But you won't leave me out in the cold, will you? I think I may claim to be your first male friend, anyhow."

"Oh, no!" she said, with some embarrassment. "Sir Robert Blacksheep was that. I mean—I mean——"

"I know what you mean," he said, "also whom you mean. He goes everywhere. He'll probably be there to-night."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Charmaine with a fervour which instantly provoked his genuine amusement.

"Why? Don't you want him?" he asked. "Why not?"

She shook her head in some agitation. "Do you really think he will be there? What shall I do if he asks me to dance?"

"Say you're engaged to me, of course!" said Basil, promptly. "I'm going to dance with you as often as you'll have me."

Again, like a shy bird, she took fright, drawing back from him though his eyes held only the most reassuring kindness. "Not—not all the evening!" she faltered.

He made a slight—very slight—movement towards her with one hand. "Why not—Charmaine?" he said, softly.

"Oh!" said Charmaine, gasping a little.

He went on speaking, his voice hushed and very gentle, almost as though he reasoned with a child. "It's all right. There's nothing to alarm you in that. Would it alarm you so very much to know that I am only going to this show because of you? So I'm hoping you'll be kind and spare me as many as you can. Will you?"

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He took the card and scrawled his initials against the first dance.

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Be kind! It was such a novel idea that Charmaine gasped again, but not this time in fear.

And then, like a child, she held out her hand to him after a brief pause to readjust her views.

"Of course," she said, smiling up at him, "I will dance with you just as often as you like."

He betrayed no surprise at her action. But he stooped immediately, like the perfect knight that he was, and reverently lifted the little eager, confiding hand to his lips.

"Thank you, Charmaine!" he said, and she knew by the way he lingered over the name that he loved it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DANCE.

THE ball at Mrs. Granard's that night was of a brilliance that far surpassed Charmaine's wildest dreams. It amazed and dazzled her. Crowds of young men were presented to her, and her card very speedily began to fill until to her dismay she discovered that Basil's name would not figure there at all if she continued to dispense her favours thus lavishly. She turned in some distress from the laughing group around her, almost breaking away to join him where he stood a few yards from her, unobtrusively looking on.

"Oh, please!" she said, rather breathlessly. "How many do you want? You didn't say, and they are going so fast."

He took the card she offered him with a smiling gesture, and scrawled his initials against the first dance. Then he looked at her.

"I should like all that are left, if I may have them," he said.

"Oh, of course!" she said eagerly. "I'd much sooner be with you. I didn't want to give away all those. Oh, I wish there were more! I never thought they would go so fast."

He smiled at her. "You won't run away at twelve o'clock, anyway," he said. "Ah, here comes the Black Sheep! Are there any others?"

"Yes." Feverishly she prompted him, standing at his elbow. "One there, look! And there! Put your name down quick before he gets here!"

She heard him laughing to himself as he scribbled his initials in the spaces she indicated; but she could not laugh. The approach of Sir Robert Blakeley filled her with apprehension.

"Don't leave me alone with him!" she whispered urgently.

"Trust me!" he murmured back.

And then came Sir Robert's voice, greeting her.

"You've got a few left for me, I hope?" he said.

She shook her head, her card pressed nervously to her breast. "I'm afraid I haven't. They've all gone so fast. I didn't expect them to."

He held out his hand. "Oh, Cinderella! That's too bad of you. Mayn't I look? Surely you can squeeze out one for me?"

Charmaine backed away, trying to laugh though her eyes were scared. "I can't indeed. There isn't one left—not one! Is there, Mr. Conister?"

"No, you're quite booked up," he agreed, with his easy air of banter. "It wasn't my fault, I assure you, Blakeley. I've come off very badly myself."

Sir Robert looked at him, and something like a veiled sneer showed for a moment in his face. Then he turned again to Charmaine.

"My luck is out to-night, it seems," he said. "But what about another run in Hop-o'-My-Thumb the day after to-morrow? I'll call round for you, shall I, as I did before?"

She felt herself turn scarlet, and at the same moment there came a mocking laugh behind her, and she glanced round to see Linda Kennedy, who had approached unnoticed. She was dressed in vivid red and looked remarkably handsome and regal.

"I shouldn't go with him too often if I were you," she said. "We all know that he's bold and bad, and Hop-o'-My-Thumb has a tiresome little trick of breaking down at midnight sometimes on lonely roads. But perhaps that's already happened, has it?"

Charmaine did not answer. She could not. The smiling hostility of this brilliant woman was unlike anything she had ever encountered. She had no weapon of defence, and stood confounded.

But at that moment the band broke into the first dance, and with absolute coolness Basil at once stepped forward and appropriated her.

"Come along!" he said. "This is mine, isn't it?"

She went with him, quivering, devoured by shame and mortification. What did he think of her, she wondered? What must he think?

But he gave her no clue to his thoughts, and they began to dance upon an almost empty floor. And then quite simply he spoke to her. "I think it's always rather a mistake," he said, "to try to be polite to people like Blakeley. It's sheer waste of time. Don't be badgered into doing things

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with him! Tell him straight out you don't want to!"

"Oh, I couldn't!" breathed Charmaine, aghast at the idea. "Besides—besides——"

He laughed in his easy way. "Besides what? What's the use of pretending to like him when everyone can see with half an eye that you don't?"

"I—don't know," faltered Charmaine. "It isn't—exactly that."

Her eyes fell. They danced for a space in silence.

When he spoke again, it was on a wholly different subject. "What a ripping dancer you are! Are you very keen?"

She glowed with pleasure, for already she knew that he would not pay her any idle compliment. "Yes, I am keen," she said. "I love it. But I didn't think I was any good. I've only really just begun to learn."

"Do you ever think you're any good at anything?" he said.

The question disconcerted her. She did not know how to reply. "But I'm not!" she said, finally.

"SHALL I tell you what I think you are?" he said unexpectedly. "Do you mind?"

She gave him a shy smile. "Of course, do! I'd love to know."

"Then I'll tell you," he said simply. "I think you are a fairy queen that has got among us by mistake. Whenever I look at you, I want to kneel down and kiss your feet."

"Oh!" said Charmaine, between amazement and horror. "Mine!"

"Yes, yours," he said. "Is it very presumptuous of me?"

"Presumptuous!" said Charmaine in great agitation. "Oh, no, not a bit presumptuous. But—but—of course you're joking! That's where I'm so stupid." She spoke deprecatingly. "I've never learnt to see jokes."

"Nor I to make them," said Basil. "I'm not joking. And I'm not the sort of cad to say a thing like that without meaning it. I said it on purpose—because I felt it. I've got more to say to you presently, but if you don't want to hear it you needn't give me any more dances. I shall understand if you don't, and"—he smiled a little—"you neeedn't be afraid of offending me."

"But—I like dancing with you," murmured Charmaine.

The words were so low that he had to bend his head to catch them.

"Do you? You really mean that?"

There was that in the question to which something within herself made instant response before she could restrain it. "Of course I do! I love it!"

"Thank you, Charmaine!" he said.

There fell another silence between them which still remained unbroken when the dance was over, and she felt as if she longed to go on and on and on.

"I will take you to my aunt now," he said, "just to let her know that you are quite safe. But you'll save those others for me later on?"

"Oh, please!" said Charmaine.

He smiled down at her. "Are you enjoying it?" he asked.

She answered him in a breathless whisper. "Oh, so much—so very much. I'm only afraid——"

"Afraid of what?" he said, as she paused.

"Afraid that it won't last," she said, in the same hushed tone.

He led her from the room without speaking, and again she wondered what was in his thoughts. Then, as they passed side by side through the vestibule, he said in a voice that she knew was meant for her alone, "It is in your power to make it last—if you will—if you really wish to."

Again she was aware of an almost overwhelming rush of emotion, so potent that the eyes she raised to his were filled with sudden unaccountable tears, and she turned them quickly away. She could not utter a word.

But he seemed to understand, and later, when she had time to think about it, she marvelled at the way he understood.

"We'll have a talk about it by and by, shall we?" he said. "That is, if you can bear to sit out with me for a little while instead of dancing."

She managed to give voice to a little laugh, and found to her relief that her tears were gone.

"That's settled, is it?" he asked her gently.

And, swayed by his gentleness, she answered softly, "Yes."

(To be continued.)

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SYBIL THORNDIKE — By Her Brother

THE ROMANTIC LIFE-STORY OF OUR GREATEST ACTRESS

By
RUSSELL THORNDIKE

Illustrated by
A. E. BESTALL

Previous instalments gave a most vivid and delightful story of Miss Thorndike's childhood, theatrical beginnings, and marriage. The climax of her career, so far, now approaches; and in our December number will be related the story of Miss Sybil Thorndike's greatest triumph—her playing of Mr. Bernard Shaw's "St. Joan."

IV. SYBIL THORNDIKE AND THE OLD VIC.

LEWIS CASSON did several productions during June, 1914, and in July he took Sybil and the family to Dymchurch, "in order," as he put it, "to keep Russell up to the scratch with his writing." I was at work on "Dr. Syn," a novel about Romney Marsh, and every evening when the babies were in bed I would be called over to their cottage from my room in the lifeboat-house to read what I had done during the day. If I hadn't done enough in the day, I wasn't given any beer for my supper. Needless to say, I always did enough. But I dislike disciplinarians, especially when they don't discipline themselves.

Now, for what follows, it is necessary here to state that Sybil and I are cursed with one virtue—feeling hot about all sorts of things. I dare say it is a blessing in disguise, for it prevents us doing all sorts of things that might make us conspicuous. Lewis Casson, possessing none of this quality, and maintaining that it is merely an affectation of conceit, very often forces us by his domineering personality to be "made hot." One of our hottest occasions occurred during this period at Dymchurch, and which is always given the caption in our family, "That disgraceful affair at Canterbury Cathedral."

We had been bathing from the sea-wall, and had thrown ourselves into the first garments that came to hand, intending to bathe again later. Lewis, however, was very anxious to try his car.

It was a dreadful machine, named "Hindle Wakes," after the successful play which Lewis had produced at Manchester. I couldn't describe it, as I know so little about cars, but it had started life as a Ford, of which family only the screw you take off to put the water in remained, for Lewis had removed the rest for local improvements. I know I recognized lots of bits of scrap iron that he had annexed from the property room. When I tell you that the bonnet was made very cleverly out of an old thunder-sheet you will understand why we never had to use a horn in a crisis. This old bonnet used to show the passer-by what it had once done in such plays as "King Lear" and "Macbeth." The dreadful thing about the car was that it went. Everything gave way to it. It unnerved passing chauffeurs. They pulled up to give it room. Therefore what was intended upon this occasion for a few minutes of tempting Providence to cast us into the dykes of Romney Marsh developed into a record run to Canterbury.

When the thunder-sheet ceased rattling we heard the Cathedral organ. It was then that Sybil made the unfortunate remark that she had never seen inside Canterbury Cathedral.

"We'll go in, then, while the car cools," remarked Lewis.

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" But we can't go in dressed like this," objected Sybil. " We look awful."

" People will be far too interested in Becket to notice us," answered Lewis. " Don't be conceited. And when all's said and done, what's the matter with our clothes ? "

Sybil's chief objection was a brass stud that he wore. The collar was on the Dymchurch beach.

" It's a new stud," argued the husband. " It still shines."

However, he compromised by leaving it in the car and tucking a handkerchief round his throat to look like a tennis-shirt.

I pretended I knew the Cathedral well, and sat on in the car, but the remarks of two tradesboys made me feel so like Harry Tate that I followed the family. We quite enjoyed the Cathedral until we heard two American ladies talking about us.

" Sadie, will you just look at those peasant-folk ? Isn't it cute to see them come in with their gipsy rigs ? I guess they're hoppers."

" Queer, homely faces," answered Sadie.

On quitting the Cathedral it was just our ill-luck to meet a well-known dignitary of the Church who had known us from childhood. We saw the look of recognition lighting up his face. We knew he would be too good a man to cut us, so we cut him, and Sybil saved the situation by nudging me and saying in a loud Cockney voice : " 'Urry up, George. Me and 'Enery wants to get 'ome."

The cleric passed on, thinking no doubt that he had done the Thorndike family an injustice, but, as Sybil said afterwards : " We couldn't disgrace the poor darling in his own precincts." I was glad when in clouds of steam we drew up once more upon the sea-wall of Dymchurch. I was even more glad when, a few days later, the steam turned to flames and " Hindle Wakes," like Joan of Arc, played its last act, thunder-sheet and all. Not being a handy man myself, I cannot help feeling meanly glad when a thoroughly competent one makes an error of judgment.

ONE morning Lewis, standing in his bathing-dress while Sybil prepared the boys for the sea, announced : " There's going to be war in Europe."

Sybil said : " Thank God you are not a soldier, then."

John, aged four, chimed in with : " I like fighting." Christopher, aged two, said he did too. Sybil told them not to swank, but to show how brave they were by jumping into the waves. They dashed in without a murmur, and Lewis taught them to swim.

A week later Lewis ordered the family to pack up for London, as he didn't like the look of things. War was declared that week. I was the first of the family to be involved, as I had joined the Westminster Dragoons, being very keen to be a trooper because I had never been cast for one on the stage. On August 5th I was told that the regiment was under orders for Egypt. My young brother Frank, who was playing with Matheson Lang at the time in " Mr. Wu," said he wasn't going to stay behind in a footling theatre if I was going off to enjoy myself in Egypt, so off he went, unbeknown to the family, and enlisted in my regiment.

By good fortune our London camping-ground was Vincent Square, adjacent to father's parish, so every morning Sybil would push the pram round and round the railings and her children had the felicity of seeing their two uncles continually ticked off by ferocious sergeant-majors and kicked off by equally ferocious horses. It was very convenient for us that Vincent Square was so near our home and friends, as during tedious night guards the girls from the parish would bring us out hot coffee and pies. Soldiering in Vincent Square wanted a lot of beating, as we afterwards discovered. We were packed off to Egypt with the first brigade of Yeomanry. Sybil and father and the little boys were driven by Lewis in a ramshackle Ford that he sported to see us ride off from London to our port of sailing, and Lewis, on arriving home, said to Sybil, " Put the children in a pram and come for a walk." So he pushed a push-chair with part of the family and she pushed the remainder in the pram, and presently Lewis said, " I've got to be in this war, I'm afraid. It's a thing we'll all have to be in. Everyone must give a hand." Sybil answered, " Don't be an ass. You're over age." Lewis remarked : " Oh, I can take off a few years." " All right," said Sybil. " If there's a row on and you're not in it, you'll never be happy, and I'm very glad you're being patriotic, because they always say Socialists aren't."

Lewis immediately enlisted in the Army Service Corps, because he liked driving lorries and thought he would be just the man to get them out of difficulties. Certainly his experiments with the ill-fated " Hindle Wakes " justified his pride to some extent.

The week following John got scarlet fever and put the lid on Sybil getting any work till that was over. From all accounts I believe she rather enjoyed herself. Christopher, Mary, and the nurse were sent round, all disinfected, to the Vicarage, and Sybil shut herself up with John for seven weeks, with carbolic sheets over the doors and meals being served by a delightful woman in the basement flat, who said infection was all nonsense if one was busy.

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After seven weeks' quarantine was over the whole family went for two weeks to Dymchurch. Whilst there Sybil had a letter from Ben Greet to say he was doing some Shakespearean productions in a comic theatre called the Old Vic, and would she like to come and play in " The Comedy of Errors," starting at once. " There you are," I can hear her saying. " No need to fuss. There's always a job waiting for you when you are ready for it."

So back they all bundled to London, and Sybil entered for the first time through the stage door of " The People's Coffee Tavern and Royal Victoria Hall," as it was officially called, and from which so much was to spring.

Frank and I had a letter from her when we were in Egypt telling us this news :—

" Scarlet fever over. Lewis is in S. Albans, putting the Army to rights. I hear he ticked off his Commanding Officer

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Sybil saved the situation by nudging me and saying in a loud Cockney voice: "'Urry up, George. Me and 'Enery wants to get 'ome."

the other day by saying, 'The only thing I've learnt since I've been in the Army, sir, is how to loaf.' He was furious, he said, because he had nothing to do, and would have been far better employed in a theatre. The O.C. said nothing, but he put Lewis into the cook-house to do the meat and light the fires, thinking that would learn him, but to the officer's disappointment Lewis thoroughly enjoyed it, and fairly disciplined the cook-house. From there he was removed to a lorry, which he likes better, and he expects to be driving one in France about Christmas. I am rehearsing for a Shakespearean season at the Old Vic, a theatre near Waterloo Station, run by a perfectly fascinating person called Lilian Baylis, who is the most original woman I've ever met. Simply dying to play her. She'd be a gorgeous part. She's not a bit like a theatrical manager. Much too keen on the 'People,' and really the whole thing promises to be great fun. I shall love working for her, as she's one of those people who just make you do things. It's rotten pay, but anything is a godsend in these times, and we all eat such a lot. At the Vic we live on coffee and buns. There's no time for anything else, and I find them very nourishing."

Ben Greet next asked Sybil if she would like to play Lady Macbeth, as he thought of doing it. She said, "I've never done real tragedy—do you think I could? I'd love to have a shot at her." So eventually she careered on as Lady M., and wrote me about it as follows:—

"Played Lady Macbeth last night. Don't laugh. I was too appalling. The critics that I read all said I was unsuited to tragedy, as my voice is too light and my features too small. That's rather depressing, isn't it? Never mind, something's got to be done about it, and I mean to jolly well swot until they do think me suitable. Tragedy is awfully difficult, I think, because it's so much larger than real life. I suppose real comedy is too, but one can enjoy quite small performances of comedy; but tragedy is either Tragic, with a big T, or it's nothing. If it's pathetic, it's awful. I simply loathe pathos, Russ, it's so soft and weak. Tragedy has fight. I simply love Lady Macbeth, though my performance so far is nothing like her. I love people like that, all granity and iron, who fight on to the last inch, and even when something bigger than them smashes them they still want to fight. . . . Tragedy isn't very churchy. Lewis goes to France week after next, so I'm thankful I'm doing tragedy, as it will relieve my feelings."

Fisher White was the Macbeth, and Sybil told me he helped her enormously, and she was very excited about playing with one who had done such glorious work in the great days at His Majesty's. "In a few years," she said, "I believe I shall be able to play Lady Macbeth in a way I want to."

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Lewis went to France at the end of January. Sybil played till April, and then, another baby being well on the way, she stopped and went to Dymchurch with the family.

Miss Baylis had asked Sybil to return to the Vic as soon as possible, and when Ann was six weeks old Sybil started rehearsing Ophelia. She kept the baby with her in London, so that between the Vic and the Vicarage she spent a good bustling time of it, going down to the country every other Sunday to see the rest of the family. I got back from Gallipoli about this time, and spent a long convalescence, having been discharged from the Army, lying on my back and hearing Sybil rehearse her parts. Lewis got home once more just then, as he had been promoted to sergeant, and then said he was going to take a commission in the Royal Engineers.

THE next adventure of the Old Vic company was to undertake the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-on-Avon. Sybil and Nancy Price shared parts; Jerrold Robertshaw, Robert Atkins, Ion Swinley, Florence Saunders, and a host of the faithful played under the direction of Ben Greet. Although I was still an invalid, B. G. thought the change would do me good—he would recommend Shakespeare as a cure for anything, I believe—so I joined the company to play just a few jolly parts, and in the following autumn I definitely became a Vic-ite with Sybil. Raids or no raids, Sybil found that life was too hectic without the children near her, so recalled her family to London. That season we did " King Lear " for the first time—Sybil in the seventh heaven because, through the scarcity of good men, she was cast for the Fool. She did lots of men's parts afterwards, including Prince Hal in " Henry V.," but the best of her efforts in that direction was undoubtedly the Fool. I never hope to see it better played. During the first night there was a bad air raid. We carried on the performance while the gunfire grew louder. It was interspersed with those dull reverberations that told of dropping bombs. The guns were kicking up pandemonium as I, attempting the part of Lear for the first time in my life, and a Dardanelles back throbbing merrily, reached the great moment of :—

" Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks ! rage ! blow !
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks !
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head ! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world !
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
That make ingrateful man ! "

I had just reached the passage, " And thou, all-shaking thunder, smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world," when there was the most appalling explosion and the Old Vic shook. I was so angry at these uncalled property-men so overdoing the storm that I strode down-stage, with Sybil at my heels, and shaking my fist at the roof of the auditorium, shouted, " Crack nature's moulds, all GERMANS spill at once ! " The audience at the Old Vic are intelligent, quick to seize the slightest point, and their applause swept through the theatre and drowned the sound of the guns, so delighted were they with the aptness of the misquotation and so in sympathy with the sentiment. The applause had barely died away when the Fool capped Lear's remark with " Here's a night that pities neither wise man nor fool ! " Once more the house rocked with delight. I am afraid the Germans would have thought us a strange people if they could have seen us at that moment. They would have realized that we did not take our pleasures sadly—but gladly. Certainly that night the raid gave an added zest to our performance. Not until the play was over did we discover how near the Germans had been to us in the Old Vic. It was the night that Waterloo Station was bombed.

Lewis was wounded in June of the next year, and Sybil was very relieved that he was safe for a time in a French hospital. In a few weeks he was sent home to recover. He got a job under Basil Dean, producing for the Army Camp Theatres, and found it a welcome change from military routine.

On August 17th, 1917, our young brother Frank was killed. He had played, at the Old Vic during his last leave, young Siward, and the wonderful words that are said of him in " Macbeth " we had put under his name on the family grave at Aylesford :—

" He paid a soldier's debt.
He only lived but till he was a man,
The which no sooner had his prowess confirm'd
In the unshrinking station where he fought,
But like a man he died . . .
Why, then, God's soldier be he ! "

Jolly old Frank. Just twenty-three. With every promise of a brilliant career in front of him. He was good-looking, popular, had a magnificent voice, and was a versatile actor. I remember him walking past our

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"You'll never get a job with Cochran if you look like a district visitor," I said.

Sybil took no notice, except to put out her tongue at me.

church one day during that last leave with Sybil and me, and he stopped by the Parish War Memorial. "Well," he said, smiling, "I've been on every list in the parish—choir-boy, choirman, bell-ringer, server, and sure as anything I'll be on that Roll of Honour—pity to miss that."

We told him to shut up, and he answered, "I don't care a bit, really, but if any of you start being melancholy about me, or wearing black, I'll just haunt you all and make your lives a nightmare."

He died flying. He loved every minute of his time in France, telling us in his letters that flying gave you a feeling that you didn't care what happened, as it was so exciting. Such a lot of jolly boys, close to us, seemed to go that summer, but one can't help feeling that they're jolly still, and nearer to us than reason lets us think. Father was terribly affected by Frank's death, but never would give it away—always saying what a splendid thing it was to die for England, and hiding the sorrow he felt. It was characteristic that, at the memorial service for my brother, father caused the

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chancel to be decorated as for a festival, and chose rousing music. For weeks he made a gallant effort to stifle his grief, but it was at last too great, and on December 9th he sang the vestry prayer before Sunday Evensong in magnificent voice, and as the choir sang Amen he fell down dead.

We were at the Old Vic in the midst of rehearsing another revue which Eric Ross and I had written. Sybil, who had written all the music, was playing Columbine, heavy woman, burlesque, principal girl, etc. Miss Baylis asked us if we should put it off, but we said father had always wanted us to go on, whatever private sorrow we had, and somehow we felt that father and Frank were closer to us at the Old Vic than anywhere else. Father never missed a week there, and was as eager and keen on the plays as we were, and we can always see him now sitting in the stalls or in the wings, getting as excited and thrilled as any of the young Vic fans.

So the revue went on, and it meant a good deal to Sybil's career. Mr. Cochran's manager came down one night and was evidently very taken with her. She did an Ibsen skit with me called "Spooks," which was very tragic, and ridiculous. She really conveyed all the Mrs. Alvings and Heddas, while I supported her with an Oswald. We wallowed in emotion and were quite revolting. Next day Sybil was summoned to Mr. Cochran. I said with true brotherly candour, "In Heaven's name make yourself look a little smarter. You'll never get a job with Cochran if you look like a district visitor." She took no notice, except to put out her tongue at me, saying she was as the Lord had made her, and that it was impossible for her to act off the stage. But I was right—Mr. Cochran was very kind—he is always very kind—and Frank Collins, his manager, was also very kind. But after they had given her one look, trying to hide their disappointment, Frank Collins said, "Are you really the girl who played the part in 'Spooks,' and all those charming bits?—because you don't look anything like her." Sybil said, "Yes, that was me, and I never do look like anything unless I'm on the stage."

They said that they hoped one of these days they might find her something to do, and home she came, and back she went to the Old Vic.

However, along comes Lewis, who said she ought to make a stir because he had to go back to France again and there were all the children to think of. But Sybil never lets herself get into business panics, and answered that, what with rehearsals and bathing babies, there was no time to waste in making stirs.

HOWEVER, some months later in the season Seymour Hicks and Cochran came to see "The School for Scandal," and were delighted with her Lady Teazle. Mr. Cochran said he had a job for her as soon as she had finished her season. This was to support Morton, the French revue comedian, in a sketch at the Pavilion. Sybil thoroughly enjoyed herself, and during that period we did make her pull her socks up and dress decently. After four weeks she was transferred to "The Better 'Ole" at the Oxford, where she played in a tragic war-sketch called "The Kiddies in the Ruins," which ran till Armistice Night. After that she had a bad time for two months, not finding a job and being very hard up. The Casson family had moved to a tiny house, converted from a shop, in a back street of Westminster. A funny rabbit warren of a place which they all adored.

Till February, 1919, Sybil lived on Stage Society two guineases, and any other play society that paid expenses, while Lewis managed to get into civil life again because Robert Loraine wanted him for "Cyrano de Bergerac." At this critical moment Mr. Cochran sent for Sybil again and asked her if she would like to understudy Madge Titheradge in "The Night Watch," and so she spent another very happy—though not enough work for her—engagement.

The Pioneers, run by Edith Craig, then asked her to play in Claudel's "The Hostage." This proved the greatest piece of luck Sybil ever had, for Tom Kealy, of Fleet Street fame, had watched her plodding efforts at the Old Vic. Also Archibald Haddon of *The Express* had kept an eye upon her, and at every opportunity these two gave Sybil a little boost in the Press, until after "The Hostage" performance all the papers were loud in their praises of this young woman, who, by her remarkable acting in this beautiful French play, promised to be a real tragedian. Then Thomas Kealy went to Leon M. Lion with his pockets full of notices, and Lion, who was looking for a new leading lady to replace Ethel Irving in "The Chinese Puzzle," sent for Sybil, and with Cochran's permission engaged her on the spot. Sybil has always felt gratitude to Leon M. Lion because he never worried about her having no West-end name, but gave her a leading salary without question, a piece of generosity she can never forget. It seemed then that her fortune was made.

Later on Arthur Collins offered her the lead in his next Drury Lane melodrama, "The Great Day," by Louis Parker. Basil Dean also offered her the part in "Sacred and Profane Love," but she accepted the Lane offer as she had never

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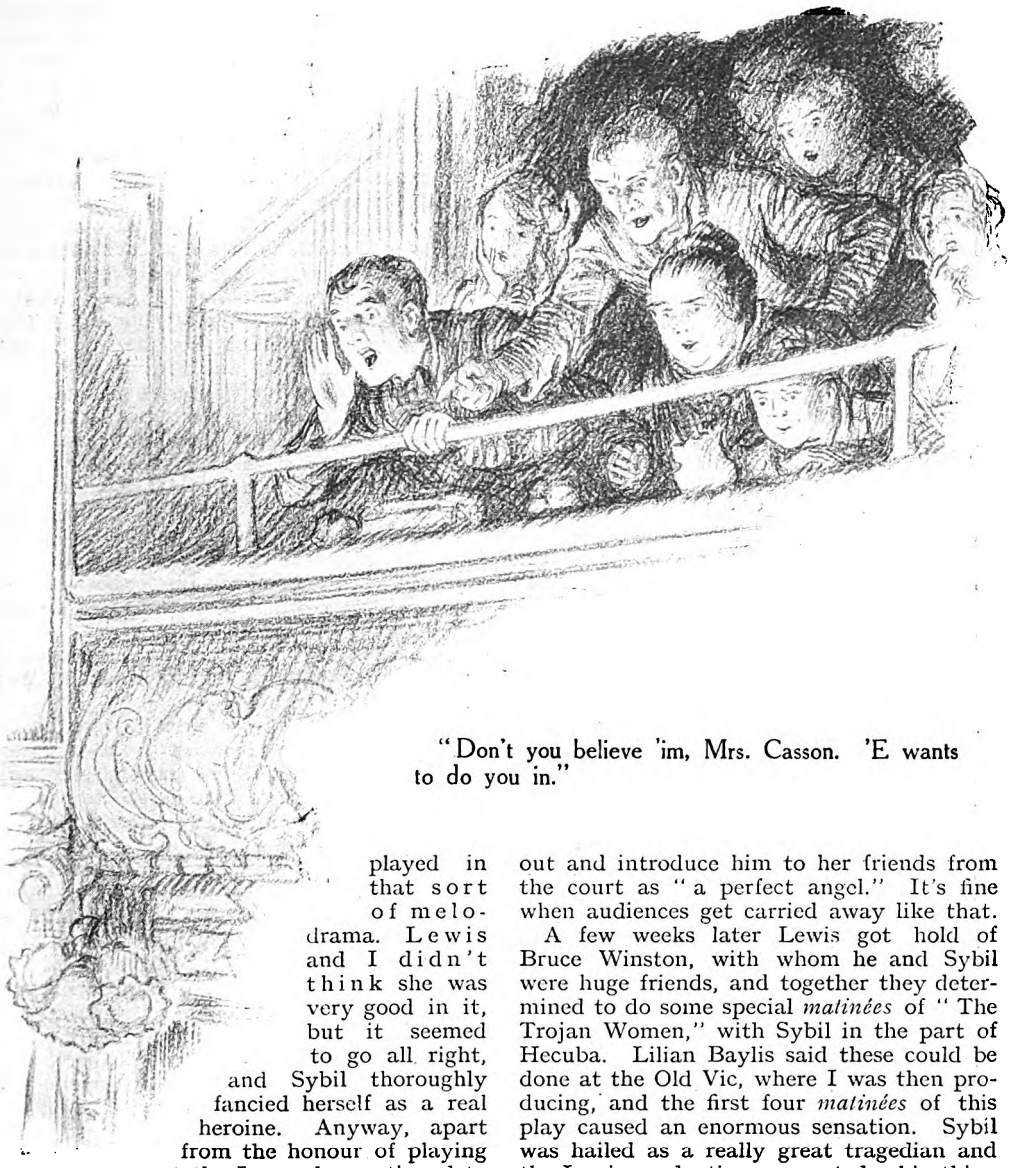

"Don't you believe 'im, Mrs. Casson. 'E wants to do you in."

played in that sort of melodrama. Lewis and I didn't think she was very good in it, but it seemed to go all right, and Sybil thoroughly fancied herself as a real heroine. Anyway, apart from the honour of playing at the Lane, she continued to dress more or less like a leading lady, so it did her good.

I shall never forget the first night. Sybil's neighbours who lived in the court had assembled in force in the gallery, and they got so enraged with the wickedness of Gerald Lawrence's part that they kept shouting out warnings such as "Don't believe 'im, Mrs. Casson. 'E's a b—— liar. 'E wants to do you in," and after the performance Gerald Lawrence, one of the dearest men that ever lived, found that certain enraged females were waiting to do *him* in as he left the stage-door, and Sybil had to lead him out and introduce him to her friends from the court as "a perfect angel." It's fine when audiences get carried away like that.

A few weeks later Lewis got hold of Bruce Winston, with whom he and Sybil were huge friends, and together they determined to do some special *matinées* of "The Trojan Women," with Sybil in the part of Hecuba. Lilian Baylis said these could be done at the Old Vic, where I was then producing, and the first four *matinées* of this play caused an enormous sensation. Sybil was hailed as a really great tragedian and the Lewis production was voted a big thing in the theatre. Lewis found that Bruce Winston's genius for colour and design was a tremendous help to him. The faithful friend, Tom Kealy, spent day and night in Fleet Street talking "Sybil," and the critics did their best to turn the woman's head, but Sybil isn't that sort.

After the first Old Vic *matinée* the crowds couldn't be got in, and the three of them looked around for another theatre in which to do more *matinées* while Sybil was still playing at Drury Lane. But no one in the West-end would so much as look at Greek plays, and their own capital consisted of their

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share from the Vic shows. One day Bruce and Lewis went to see Charles Gulliver of the Holborn Empire, and put it to him how nice it would be to run four *matinées* there, and he said he didn't know anything about Greek plays, but he was always willing to venture, and he'd let them do it at his music-hall, as no West-end manager would let them into his theatre. So well did these *matinées* pan out that when the Drury Lane job finished the three enthusiasts thought they were quite safe for management. They had about two hundred pounds between them.

JUST about that time a big Drama League dinner was given, with Lord Howard de Walden in the chair. Everyone made lovely speeches about everyone—they do make nice speeches at the Drama League—and everyone said the theatre was never so splendid as now, and all patted all on the back. Suddenly Lewis was called upon to speak, as they found there was just time for a little more back-patting to complete a glorious self-complacent evening. Lewis, however, had heard quite enough of that sort of thing, and jumping to his feet he paralysed the company with a violent attack on the Drama League, further violent attacks on the theatre and the Press, and wound up by saying that thank God he disagreed with everything everyone had said, and that if somebody didn't wake up and do something worth while soon he was sure that the theatre in England would die the death it so thoroughly deserved. He succeeded in turning a perfectly charming and peaceful dinner into a seething maelstrom of unpleasantness, everyone feeling that perhaps, after all, they were not such wonderful people as everyone had been at such serene pains to point out.

Just when Sybil's best friends were lamenting that she was saddled to such a tactless, uncouth husband, Lord Howard de Walden saved the situation by patting him on the back for his truth and courage. He must have regretted this kind gesture, for two days later Lewis and Bruce bearded him with a request for a thousand pounds for a season at the Holborn Empire. Two other victims were knocked down for two hundred and fifty pounds, with the result that the money was given them on the understanding that if it were lost, well and good, but that they were under promise not to ask for any more. So, pocketing their ill-gotten spoils, they went to Gulliver and took the theatre for *matinées*.

"The Trojan Women" again—and then they asked Bernard Shaw to let them do "Candida." Sybil hadn't met Shaw since the early days when she had understudied Candida, but she wrote to him and said she had taken his advice about having lots of children, and now knew all about everything appertaining to Life, and please might she act Candida. Mr. Shaw said "Yes," and went himself to produce the play for them. The opening of their management proved successful, as "Candida" was a success, and the next play was the "Medea," which Sybil was always aching to do, though she still had the Lewis complex about not being suited. "Medea" a huge "go," and everyone terribly bucked. The newspapers acclaimed her as a "great actress," and Sybil was furious when she read it. "They don't know anything about Greek plays, or they'd never say I can play tragedy. You wait. I will do it one day, and they'll all say what a pity it is I've gone off. But I'll have to work for about twenty years on my voice first." Sybil never thinks anyone knows anything about Greek plays but herself and Lewis. I think she condemns everyone to ignorance because she had a letter from a certain well-known manager—who shall be nameless—who wrote asking Sybil where Mr. Euripides was to be found, as he would like to commission him to write him a play.

Their success rather went to the heads of the three, who then lost them—I mean their heads—and Sybil saying she was tired of grand parts, they agreed to change their policy suddenly and produce a play by a new author—"Tom Trouble."

"Tom Trouble" was disastrous in that it wrecked the Bruce-Lewis-Sybil management. No one came. Well, hardly anyone, and the money went. Sybil and Lewis were both offered parts in "The Mystery of the Yellow Room"; they sighed and cursed and shut down their management, with all the money so generously given them dead and gone. They say they'll pay it back one day, and I hope they will, but one never knows with actors, for as soon as they make a bit out of the theatre they lose it again in the theatre.

"The Yellow Room" proved lucky, as from that came José Levy with his really glorious scheme of opening a Grand Guignol theatre in the Adelphi. When Sybil heard the plan she nearly fainted with excitement, and she seized José by the throat and shouted, "But it's just what Russell and I have always wanted, and if you don't have him you won't get me, because if you want horrors he's got a mind like a ghost-story in a morgue."

And so it was fixed up that the three of us were in it, and here starts one of the happiest and thrillingest chapters of Sybil's career.

(*Next month: Sybil Thorndike and "St. Joan."*)

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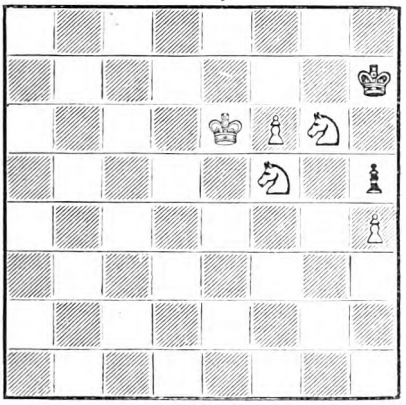
PERPLEXITIES.

By HENRY E. DUDENEY.

932.—A WILY CHESS PUZZLE.

On visiting a chess club in a West Country town recently I was shown this very amusing puzzle, but could not obtain the name of its author. I found that

BLACK—2 pieces.



WHITE—5 pieces.

White mates in two with Kt at Kt 6.

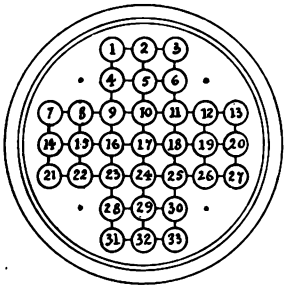
it was not difficult to solve. Success depends on your detecting the trick, which I consider quite legitimate. White has to play and mate with the Kt on Kt 6 in two moves.

933.—A CLOCK PUZZLE.

How soon between the hours of five and six will the hour and minute hands of a clock be exactly at right-angles?

934.—ANOTHER SOLITAIRE PUZZLE.

Referring to our puzzle No. 920, in the August issue, Mr. G. L. Moore, who has made a special study of Solitaire puzzles, sends me two solutions in twenty



moves, beating my own answer by four moves. Without the condition of leaving the last ball in hole No. 2 the fewest possible moves appears to be seventeen. But with other openings, it can be done in sixteen moves. Mr. Moore proposes the following interesting example:—

Remove the ball from hole No. 1 and then finish the game in sixteen moves, removing thirteen balls in the last two moves and ending in hole No. 1. It would seem that there is only one way of removing any thirteen balls in two moves.

935.—A CHICKEN PUZZLE.

"Now, Maria," said a prosperous chicken farmer, "if we should sell off 75 chickens, as I propose, our stock of feed would last just 20 days longer than at present, while if we should buy 100 extra fowls, as you suggest, we should run out of feed 15 days sooner."

How many chickens had they?

936.—HEARD ON THE RACECOURSE.

"Yes," said the racehorse on his triumphant return to the stables, "I put on a good *third*, and won by *first* and *second*, and I consider myself to be *whole* at the game."

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

928.—EASY DRAUGHTS.

Play as follows: 31–27, 4 8, 27–24, 8 11, 24–20, 11 15, 22–26, and Black wins.

929.—SQUARES AND CUBES.

If we make one number 625 m^6 and the other number double the first we can get any number of solutions of a particular series. Thus, if we make m equal 1 we get the answer $625^2+1250^2=125^3$, and $625^3+1250^3=46875^2$. In the case of the previous puzzle, if we make one number 10 m^6 and the other 6 m^6 we get a similar series with the lowest case $10^2-6^2=4^3$, and $10^3-6^3=28^2$, as I gave it.

930.—AN OLD ENIGMA.

In the year 1793, factions in France, monarchy erased, The Law turned upside down, Religion set aside and Rebellion in all quarters

931.—AN OLD CARD TRICK

The cards face downwards are arranged in the following order: 3, 8, 7, 1, K, 6, 4, 2, Q, J, 10, 9, 5. My own way of remembering the order is to use the following sentence secretly: FIVE NONENTITIES

5 9
ATTEND KNAVISH QUEST TO FORTIFY SICK
10 J Q 2 4 6
KING ON SEVERAL HATEFUL TREASONS.
K 1 7 8 3

A moment's thought will show that each successive word will suffice to indicate the cards. I deal the thirteen cards from the pack face upwards and then pick them out (apparently at random) in the order I require, then reverse the order with the 5 at the bottom face downwards.

927.—THE EGG CABINET.

In the solution last month, 524 cells and 528 should read 2284 and 2288, a slip of the pen that readers will doubtless have understood.

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Big Game

By

RICHARD CONNELL

Illustrated by
S. TRESILIAN

I LOOKED the lion squarely in the eye. He was not twenty feet away. He did not move. Neither did the rhino. He was even nearer. His horned snout was aimed point-blank at my shirt-front. Something had to be done. I rang for another bottle of ginger ale.

" It always gives me a turn," the old steward said, " when I come up them stairs and see 'em looking at me. Ain't they life-like, sir ? "

I sighed. " Very," I agreed.

He wagged his white head. " It's hard," he said, " on the members who have had a little more than is good for them. Do you know, sir, in the past month I have personally picked up three gentlemen who came on the beasts unexpected-like and fell backward down the stairs."

I sat staring at the lion and the rhino. The large university club to which I belong is very proud of its collection of heads of big game. They were shot by a distinguished alumnus, skinned by his own hands, and perhaps stuffed by him too. In the dining-room, water buffalo and moose glare down at you with fierce glass eyes as you eat your eggs. Antelope and gnu peer over your shoulder and watch your moving pen in the writing-room. A cheetah grins at the milk-shake machine in what, in a mellower era, was the bar. The lion and the rhino grace a small lounge room.

As I sat contemplating the handsomest and the ugliest of beasts I became aware that another man, in a near-by chair, was also gazing pensively at them. I glanced sidewise at him. He exhibited the semi-baldness of forty, a city-pale face, and large, moody eyes. An open book lay on his knees.

The expression on his face reminded me of something. I had seen that expression once before. The dining-car in which I was riding slowed down near a pile of sleepers in the yards near Albany one evening. On the sleepers sat a gaunt tramp. On his face was that look—giant despair, faint hope, a cosmic wistfulness—and he was looking not at me but at the thick, juicy porterhouse steak the waiter had just brought me.

The man in the lounge, noting that I was looking his way, nodded at me. Hastily I turned my mind inside out and decided I must have met him some years before. One of those casual club meetings.

" So-and-So, I want you to meet What's-His-Name."

" How do you do ? "

" How do you do ? "

" Hot, isn't it ? "

" Yes, isn't it ? "

" Well, I must be rushing along. I'm late for a date. Glad to have met you. Good-bye."

" Good-bye."

Then for a month or so you stare tentatively at each other when you meet in the club, and he doesn't speak to you because he isn't quite sure you are the fellow he met, and you don't speak to him because you aren't quite sure he is the fellow you met, and that's the end of it.

I returned the nod. A vague theory flitted through my mind that his name was Dugdale, or maybe Hyatt.

" Ever hunt 'em ? " he asked.

" No, never. Did you ? "

" No, never. Always wanted to. Never had the chance."

" Same here."

Somewhat diffidently, I thought, he held out to me the book he was reading. " Ever read this ? " he asked.

I glanced at it. It was one of those chronicles of prowess with gun and camera every big-game hunter feels compelled to write. I think the name of it was " Face to Face with the King of Beasts," by Major A. B. C.

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Duff, O.B.E., F.R.G.S., Veteran Explorer and Hunter—something like that.

"Yes, I've read it," I replied. "I've read most of 'em, I think. Corking good shot, that fellow."

"Or a corking good liar," said Dugdale, or Hyatt. There was more than a tinge of bitterness in his tone as he added, "The lucky stiff!"

"You'd like to go hunting?" I queried.

"Would you like to have a billion dollars?" he asked. "I'm wild to go."

"Are you a good shot?"

"No. I once broke eight clay pipes out of a possible ten in a shooting gallery on Broadway. That's my experience as a Nimrod to date." He looked at the lion and sighed. "I'm no sort of hunter," he said. "I don't care particularly about shooting things. It would be enough for me if I could just see them in their native haunts, track them down and take snapshots of them. The chase—that's what gets me."

"Well," I said, "there's no law I know of which prevents you from going over to Africa and knocking over a few elephants, ostriches, and what not."

He laughed, a hard, short, ironical laugh. "Oh, isn't there?" he said. "How about the law of economics? I'm nailed to New York. In my business—I'm an accountant—you can't get away for pleasure jaunts to Africa, even if you have the money, and I haven't enough to buy BB shot for a sparrow hunt."

"I'm in the same boat," I said.

"You'd like to go hunting, too?"

"Not hunting, exactly," I said. "To travel—that's my dream. I'd rather see than shoot. China, Java, Japan, Burma, Singapore, Calcutta, Cairo——"

"Aw, cut it out," he said. "What's the use? We're handcuffed to this city. I am, anyway. Look now! A hunting licence in British East Africa costs a hundred pounds—nearly five hundred dollars. The trip out and back costs another thousand, anyway—even if you swim part of the way. The cheapest sort of *safari*, with porters and guides and all that, sets you back another thousand. What chance has a man like me—on a salary, and not a big one—if he lives in New York, where it costs him half a dollar to eat a pancake and a dime every time he takes a breath of fresh air?"

"I guess," I said, "that the only thing for people like us to do is to become philosophers—make the best of things."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, turn off the sweetness and light!" he cut in. "That game wears thin in no time. Here I am, hungry and thirsty for adventure and excitement and the kick of the chase, and what can I do about it? Read and dream! Read and dream! But the time has come when that is not enough. Can a man satisfy his appetite for food by gazing at a handsome photograph of a roast turkey? Answer me that!"

"Probably not," I said.

"I tell you," he said, earnestly, "it's getting to be an obsession with me. I've been so often to all the gun stores in town, examining the hunting rifles, that the assistants think I'm mad, and I'm afraid to bother them any more. Ditto with the camera stores. Same way at the zoo. If I hang around there much more they'll put me in a cage." He glared at the lion, at the rhino and at his book. "Sometimes," he said, "I'm so desperate for a bit of sport I think of taking a shot at myself." He seemed to mean it.

"I take it," I said, "that you're not married."

"No; never had a chance there, either." He took up the book he had been reading. "Just listen," he said. "The fellow's diary ——" He read aloud:—

"AUGUST TWENTY-SEVENTH.—Mombasa, typical tropical port. Found it rather dull. Same old savages in native dress, war paint, shields, and the like. Members of the Monumwezi, Kavirondo, Masai, and Wandorobo tribes—the regular lot. Noisy, smelly bazaars; piles of fresh elephant tusks; skins of lions and leopards—the usual familiar Africa scene. Poked around an hour, got sleepy and went to bed."

A NOISE like a growl escaped from Dugdale, or Hyatt. "Got sleepy and went to bed!" he grunted. "I hope he snored his head off, the big boob!" He read on:—

"SEPTEMBER TWENTY-SECOND.—On *safari*. About forty miles south of Lake Victoria Nyanza. Nice country. Very picturesque. Not so beautiful as Surrey, but pleasing. A routine day. Saw a lion. Shot him. Ran across a rhino. Settled him. Saw a greater koodoo—rare. Missed him at four hundred and fifty-seven yards. My eye a bit off to-day. Stalked the koodoo through a donga. Followed his trail for four hours. Thought I spied him. It was only a pup giraffe. Kicked him out of my way. Still after Mr. Koodoo. Got within range. Brought him down at three hundred and eighty-nine yards. Good head. Passed herds of zebra, topi, kongoni, dig-dig, and no end of wildebeests. Shot some of them. My collection now needs a honey badger, a fringe-eared oryx, and a klipspringer. On my way back to my *bomba* my gun-bearer, Dumba-Dumba, suddenly cried, 'Look, *bwana*'—master—'there is a *simba*'—lion. Sure enough it was. A monster male glowered down at me from the branches of a baobab tree. (N.B.—Apparently some lions do climb trees.) With a roar he hurled himself at me. I was nonplussed.

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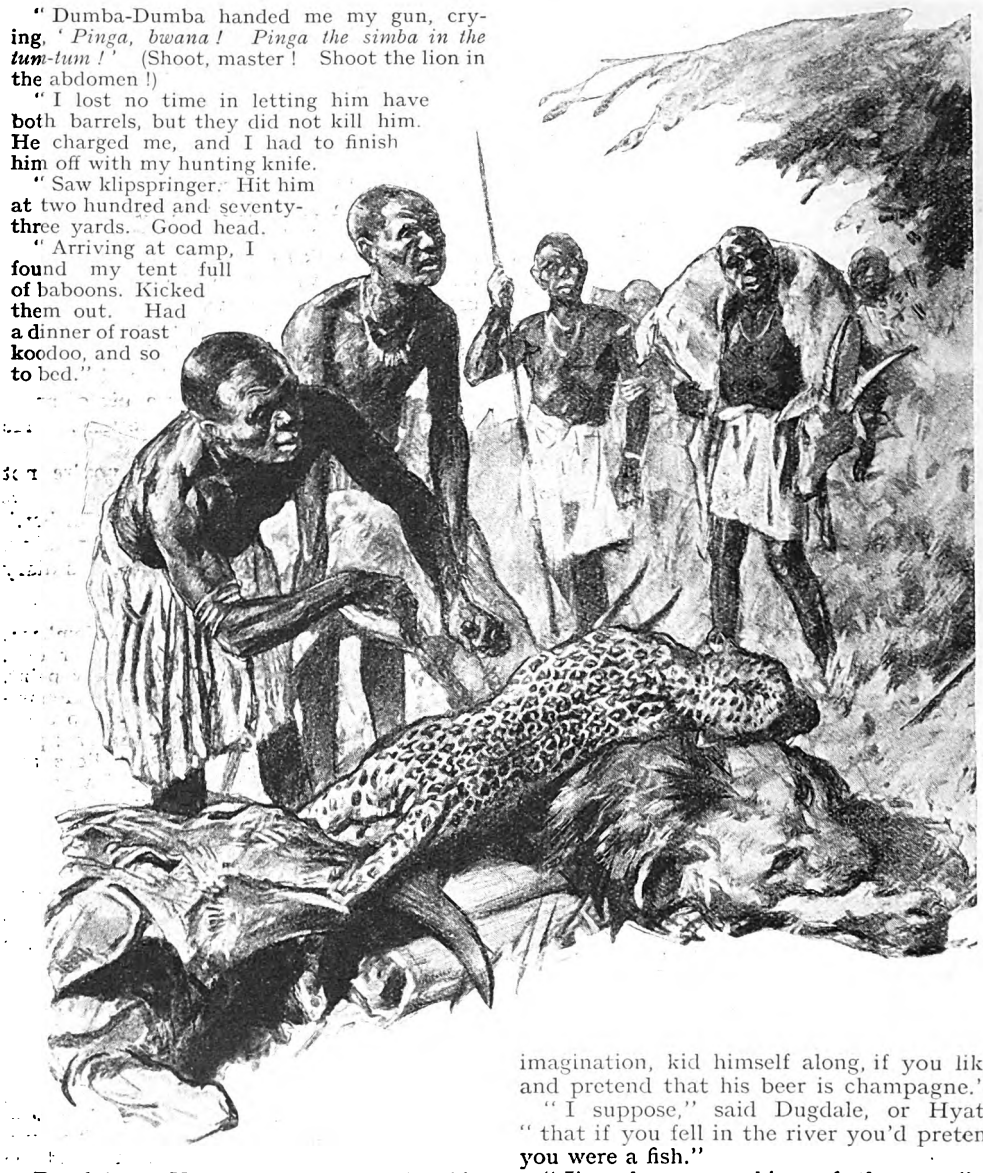

"Dumba-Dumba handed me my gun, crying, '*Pinga, bwana! Pinga the simba in the tum-tum!*' (Shoot, master! Shoot the lion in the abdomen!)

"I lost no time in letting him have both barrels, but they did not kill him. He charged me, and I had to finish him off with my hunting knife.

"Saw klipspringer. Hit him at two hundred and seventy-three yards. Good head.

"Arriving at camp, I found my tent full of baboons. Kicked them out. Had a dinner of roast koodoo, and so to bed."

Dugdale, or Hyatt, tossed the book aside. "Just a regular routine day!" he said. A look of the utmost dejection and despair was on his face. "I'm like the lions in the zoo," he said. "They want to get to the jungle, but they're caged. Well, so am I. I won't be able to stand it much longer."

"You're not exactly like the lions," I said. "Man, after all, is the adaptable animal."

He made a wry face. "More philosophy!" he exclaimed.

"A man has to work out his own salvation," I said. "He has to learn to make his dreams fit his means. He has to use his imagination, kid himself along, if you like, and pretend that his beer is champagne."

"I suppose," said Dugdale, or Hyatt, "that if you fell in the river you'd pretend you were a fish."

"I've done something of the sort," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"I told you," I replied, "that my strongest desire is to travel, and I can't do it. China, India, even Italy, might as well be in the moon, so far as I'm concerned. Not much chance of getting to them. Well, having accepted that fact, I've done the next best thing." He looked at me blankly. "I've invented a game," I said. "It's called 'Around the World in a Night.'"

"How do you play it?"

"Come along with me," I said. "It's almost dinner-time."

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and more garish chop-suey palaces down the street. He'll let you in if you know the way."

We had a dinner of bird's-nest soup, sweet and pungent fish, eggs *foo yong*, a marvellous mixture of chicken, bamboo sprouts, and unidentifiable Chinese vegetables, candied fruits, and, after some cajolery, some rice wine.

"Look around you," I said to Dugdale, or Hyatt. "Listen to those Chinese chattering and squeaking. Why, aren't you in Shanghai right now?"

"I suppose it is rather like this," he said, helping himself to more roast water chestnuts.

After dinner we went out and were in New York again. "Where do you want to go now?" I said. "Name any country."

"Italy," he said.

We took a taxi to Giacomo's in Carmine Street. The air was full of smoke, gestures, and liquid vowels. Young Italians and old Italians played vociferous card games. In the back room somebody was forcing "O Sole Mio" out of an accordion. We had a bottle of red wine, new, strong, and heartening.

"You're in Naples," I told Dugdale, or Hyatt.

He emptied his glass. "*Si, si, signor,*" he said.

"Next," I said, "we can go to Turkey, if you wish, up on Lexington Avenue, not far from Madison Square, and have Turkish coffee, or even *shish kaba* and stuffed vine leaves; or we can go down to Syria in West Street and eat black honey; or we can go to India up in the Forties and have fifteen different kinds of curry; or to the Great White Bear, where we can sip kvass or vodka and watch a seven-foot Cossack dance and throw knives in the floor, and listen to a bunch of ex-grand dukes in red-and-green blouses sing the Volga Boat Song; or perhaps you'd rather go to Japan on Sixth Avenue and eat some *sukiyaki*, cooked to order at your own table, right before your very eyes."

"I can't eat another crumb," said Dugdale, or Hyatt.

"Well," I said, "perhaps you'd like to drop into a genuine Munich Rathskeller, where they have something dark and frothy; there are at least four of them in Yorkville. Or, if you feel French, there's a little place in Chelsea with a zinc bar that people tell me is pure Montmartre."

Dugdale, or Hyatt, considered. "Turkey first," he decided. The coffee was thick and potent.

Streaks of dawn were beginning to show in the sky when I finally piloted Dugdale, or Hyatt, to his apartment in West Seventy-second Street. Our last stop had been in Hungary, way up Second Avenue, where a gipsy band in red coats teased Viennese waltzes out of sirupy fiddles or broke into a frenzied *csárdás*, and where they served a fiery fluid optimistically labelled Tokay.

"Wanna see lion," said Dugdale, or Hyatt.

"They're asleep," I said. "The zoo isn't open this early."

"Wanna see lion," he insisted. "We could wake 'em up. Throw milk bottles at 'em."

"What!" I said, sternly. "Would you, a lover of lions, wake them up for your own selfish pleasure? They have a hard life. They're tired."

He began to weep softly. "Poor li'l lions," he said.

As I deposited him in his apartment I heard him saying, "Man, the adapple an'mal—man, the adapple an'mal. That's me."

FOR a month I did not go near the club. I dropped in one evening and was sitting in the small lounge gazing at the lion and rhino over a glass of ginger ale.

Someone came in with a crisp step. I saw that it was Dugdale, or Hyatt, and he seemed like a new man. The droopy, dejected look was gone from his face. His eyes sparkled.

"Hello!" I said. "How have you been?"

"Great," he said.

"What have you been doing?"

"Hunting."

"Africa?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"New York."

I stared at him. Outwardly he seemed both sober and sane. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"Remember what you said—'man, the adaptable animal'?"

"Yes."

"Remember how we went round the world in a night?"

"Of course."

"Well, that gave me an idea."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir; and what's more, I acted on it." He drew from his pocket a thick red notebook. "Want to hear a few entries from my diary?" he asked.

"Your what?"

"My diary—hunting log—what you will."

"Go ahead," I said.

He flipped open the notebook and read:—

"OCTOBER TENTH, SATURDAY.—Having spent the previous night in China, Italy, Turkey,

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Germany, Russia—I think—and Hungary, I woke feeling rather fuzzy. However, it was such a fine day for hunting that I soon forgot that my head felt like a bass drum full of flying squirrels. I left my Seventy-second Street *bomba* at eight. Saw much game disappearing into the Seventy-second Street Subway Station. Flushed a bull plumber and stalked him to his lair in Fifty-seventh Street. Passed several droves of salesmen on their way to their feeding grounds.

"Just outside my office in Thirty-ninth Street I saw a handsome creature which I identified as a doe secretary. Fine head. Red hair. Very graceful. Wanted her for my collection, but she moved out of range and vanished into an elevator.

"At noon explored some new country west of Broadway. Passed large herds of shopgirls and clerks grazing peacefully in cafeterias. Saw the fresh spoor of a full-grown traffic cop. I need one for my collection. Saw the doe secretary again, browsing in a tea-room. Got within smiling distance. However, she disappeared into a flock of book-keepers, and I lost sight of her.

"In the evening went for a moonlight stalk up Broadway. Plenty of game about. Bagged a fine specimen of farmer-on-first-visit-to-city. He was chewing his cud and gazing into the window of a lingerie shop. Brought him down at four feet——"

"Flushed a bull plumber and stalked him to his lair in Fifty-seventh Street."

"Great heavens!" I cried. "You haven't been shooting people?"

"Certainly not," said Dugdale, or Hyatt. "The idea is this: You identify the species—we'll say it's a retired bar-tender; you can't miss the type—and follow him till he stops. Then, if you get near enough to touch him, that counts as a kill." He was entirely serious.

"Please go on," I said. He read again from his notebook:—

"OCTOBER ELEVENTH, SUNDAY.—Pushed into new territory in the region of One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street. Saw many fine specimens of black-bottom dancers, barbers, and waiters. Stalked one handsome specimen of heavyweight pugilist nine blocks and finally brought him down. Secured a fine fat pastry-cook — black. Natives report that herds of authors are to be seen in Harlem at this time of year. Must investigate. Would like to bag a brace of novelists, male and female. Returning to camp, I saw coveys of real-estate brokers with their mates and young. Secured a young French sailor in uniform—rare. Ate venison for dinner.

"OCTOBER TWELFTH, MONDAY.—Left camp early. Mild breeze from the west. Ran into a school of vaudeville midgets and got a good bagful. Flushed a large buck college professor and stalked him to Columbus Circle, where he doubled on his tracks and got away. Near my office I again saw that doe secretary. She saw me, but showed only slight signs of alarm. Trailed her to the office of a lawyer, where she works. Abandoned the chase for the time being. Plenty of small game visible on my way home from work—doctors, firemen, and mannequins. Got a good specimen of long-haired musician after an exciting stalk up Fifth Avenue. Bear steak for dinner.

"OCTOBER THIRTEENTH, TUESDAY.—Clear bracing weather. Big migration of game south

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from Bronx to Wall Street. Heard the bellow of an old-clothes man. Followed the tracks of a moving-picture comedian and bagged him as he was about to turn into his hotel. Outside the office saw the doe secretary. Rode up in the same elevator with her. Risked a nod at six feet. Thought it registered. On way home had a long stern chase of what I was sure was a district attorney, but when I finally ran him down at Sixty-seventh Street and Broadway he turned out to be a dentist. Fine head.

"OCTOBER FOURTEENTH, WEDNESDAY.—A big day! Followed a hot trail left by the doe secretary to a restaurant in Madison Avenue and ran her down at a corner table. She proved tame. Her name is Cynthia."

"The diary skips some time here," said Dugdale, or Hyatt, apologetically. "I was too busy to do any hunting for a while. The next entry is a month later. Shall I read it?"

"By all means," I said. He read:—

"NOVEMBER TWELFTH, THURSDAY.—Weather cold but bright. Saw a fine specimen of red-nosed city official at the Marriage Licence Bureau. Captured an excellent specimen of clergyman at St. Hector's Church.

"NOVEMBER FOURTEENTH, SATURDAY.—Exploring a new territory—Atlantic City. Much game about. Cynthia and I spent the afternoon hunting on the Boardwalk and bagged many fine specimens."

"Congratulations," I said.

"I must be rushing along now," said Dugdale, or Hyatt. "Cynthia and I are dining early to-night. Afterward we're going over to Brooklyn. I hear that there are some strange species over there."

ACROSTICS.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 184.

IN childhood's day they struggled for the crown;
One beat the other all around the town.

1. "The chieftain stood," pictured in laureate's page,
   "Like the strong oak, amid the tempest's rage."
2. Here famous sisters lived; the name they bore
   Named sailor's dukedom some few years before.
3. A place in Wessex first select, then take
   The French for it, add head, and maid you make.
4. One letter add to this, there will be seen
   City where Darling of the World was queen.
5. Give her a head, and she will be complete,
   Whose mate, if he were headless, might be neat.
6. Who plants this fragment in the heart of tree
   A man of many lines may hope to see.
7. Roving about from place to place; 'tis plain,
   The central part is very far from sane.
8. What is all round is the first thing to find,
   And then what is all round we leave behind.
9. A couple of his sons should we unite,
   And change one letter, counsel we should sight.
10. Now comes the word—'tis present here, in fact—
    That bids the country rouse itself and act.

PAX.

Answers to Acrostic No. 184 should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor, THE STRAND MAGAZINE, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on November 10th.

Two answers may be sent to every light.

It is essential that solvers, with their answers to this acrostic, should send also their real names and addresses.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 183.

(The Third of the Series.)

O, WHAT an elegant pair to view.
When the animals went in two by two!

1. A deer that is far from being the least.
2. Camelious, South American beast
3. From an antelope one letter goes.
4. A wrinkly dog with a turned-up nose.
5. The river-horse leaves one quarter behind.
6. The crocodile is the American kind.
7. The bulls and the cows are both turned round.
8. And the leopard-cat is backward found.

REMUS.

1. E l K
2. L l a m A
3. E l a N
4. P u G
5. H i p p o p o t A
6. A l l i g a t o R
7. N e x O
8. T o l e c O

NOTES.—Light 2. Llama, or lama. 3. Eland. 4. Pug, or pug-dog. 5. Hippopotamus. 7 and 8. Reversed.

Solvers who write to the Acrostic Editor and desire answers to their queries should, with their letters, enclose stamped addressed envelopes, and he will endeavour to reply.

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THE

CHRISTMAS NUMBER

of

The STRAND MAGAZINE

December,
1928.

Osbert Mulliner seemed to be gazing upon one of those orgy scenes which have done so much to popularize the motion-pictures.

(See page 533.)

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SCARCELY HAD THE ECHOES OF THE KISS DIED AWAY WHEN OSBERT WAS AWARE THAT THERE WAS STANDING AT HIS ELBOW A TALL, BROAD-SHOULDERED MAN.

(See page 524.)

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THE ORDEAL OF OSBERT MULLINER

By

P. G. WODEHOUSE

Illustrated by
CHARLES CROMBIE

THE unwonted gravity of Mr. Mulliner's demeanour had struck us all directly he entered the bar parlour of the Angler's Rest; and the silent, moody way in which he sipped his hot Scotch and lemon convinced us that something was wrong. We hastened to make sympathetic inquiries.

Our solicitude seemed to please him. He brightened a little.

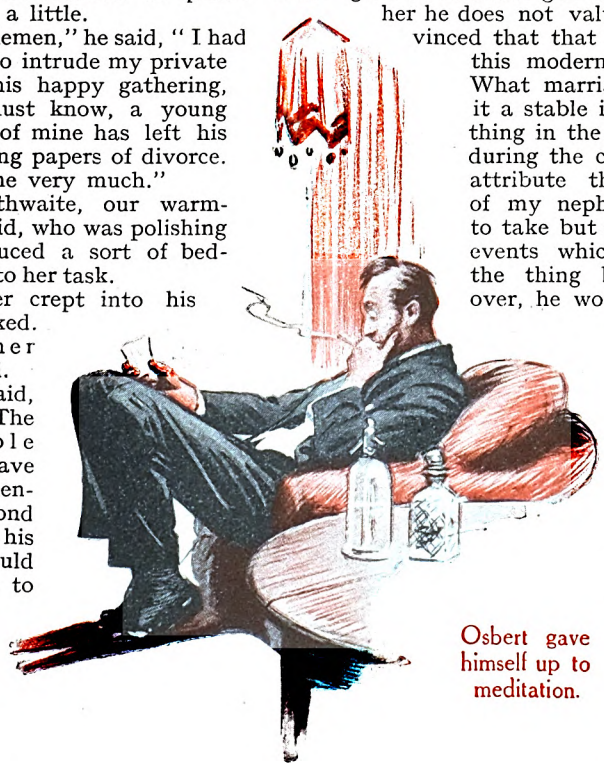
"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I had not intended to intrude my private troubles on this happy gathering, but, if you must know, a young second cousin of mine has left his wife and is filing papers of divorce. It has upset me very much."

Miss Postlethwaite, our warm-hearted barmaid, who was polishing glasses, introduced a sort of bedside manner into her task.

"Some viper crept into his home?" she asked.

Mr. Mulliner shook his head.

"No," he said, "no vipers. The whole trouble appears to have been that, whenever my second cousin spoke to his wife, she would open her eyes to their fullest extent, put her head on one side like a canary, and say, 'What?'



Osbert gave himself up to meditation.

He said he had stood it for eleven months and three days, which he believes to be a record, and that the time had now come, in his opinion, to take steps."

Mr. Mulliner sighed.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "marriage to-day is made much too simple for a man. He finds it so easy to go out and grab some sweet girl that when he has got her he does not value her. I am convinced that that is the real cause of this modern boom in divorce. What marriage needs, to make it a stable institution, is something in the nature of obstacles during the courtship period. I attribute the solid happiness of my nephew Osbert's union, to take but one instance, to the events which preceded it. If the thing had been a walk-over, he would have prized his wife far less highly."

"It took him a long time to teach her his true worth?" we asked.

"Love burgeoned slowly?" hazarded Miss Postlethwaite.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Mulliner, "she loved him at first sight. What made the wooing of Mabel Petherick-Soames so

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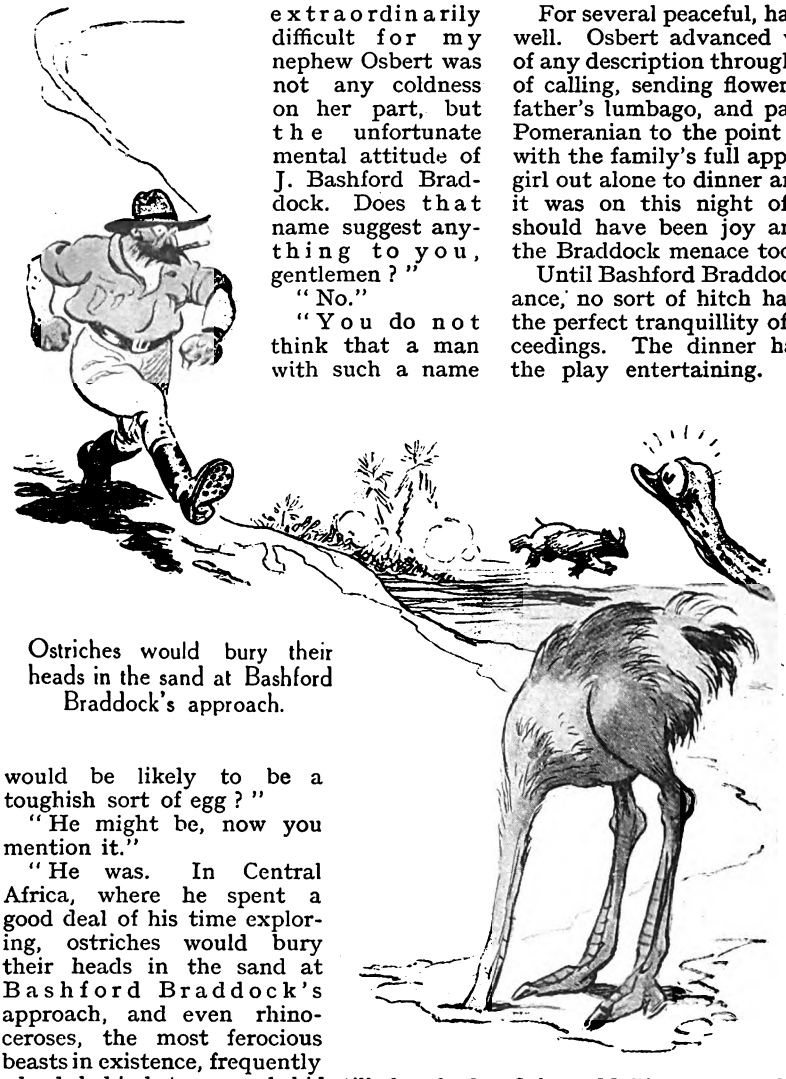

Ostriches would bury their heads in the sand at Bashford Braddock's approach.

extraordinarily difficult for my nephew Osbert was not any coldness on her part, but the unfortunate mental attitude of J. Bashford Braddock. Does that name suggest anything to you, gentlemen?"

"No."

"You do not think that a man with such a name would be likely to be a toughish sort of egg?"

"He might be, now you mention it."

"He was. In Central Africa, where he spent a good deal of his time exploring, ostriches would bury their heads in the sand at Bashford Braddock's approach, and even rhinoceroses, the most ferocious beasts in existence, frequently edged behind trees and hid till he had passed. And the moment he came into Osbert's life my nephew realized with a sickening clearness that those rhinoceroses had known their business."

UNTIL the advent of this man Braddock (said Mr. Mulliner), Fortune seemed to have lavished her favours on my nephew Osbert in full and even overflowing measure. Handsome, like all the Mulliners, he possessed in addition to good looks the inestimable blessings of perfect health, a cheerful disposition, and so much money that Income-Tax assessors screamed with joy when forwarding Schedule D to his address. And, on top of all this, he had fallen deeply in love with a most charming girl and rather fancied that his passion was returned.

For several peaceful, happy weeks all went well. Osbert advanced without a set-back of any description through the various stages of calling, sending flowers, asking after her father's lumbago, and patting her mother's Pomeranian to the point where he was able, with the family's full approval, to invite the girl out alone to dinner and a theatre. And it was on this night of nights, when all should have been joy and happiness, that the Braddock menace took shape.

Until Bashford Braddock made his appearance, no sort of hitch had occurred to mar the perfect tranquillity of the evening's proceedings. The dinner had been excellent, the play entertaining. Twice during the third act Osbert had ventured to squeeze the girl's hand in a warm, though of course gentlemanly, manner; and it seemed to him that the pressure had been returned. It is not surprising, therefore, that by the time they were saying good night on the steps of her house he had reached the conclusion that he was on to a good thing which should be pushed along.

Putting his fortune to the test, to win or lose it all, Osbert Mulliner reached forward, clasped Mabel Petherick-Soames to his bosom, and gave her a kiss so ardent that in the silent night it sounded like somebody letting off a Mills bomb.

And scarcely had the echoes died away when he was aware that there was standing at his elbow a tall, broad-shouldered man in evening dress and an opera hat.

There was a pause.

"Hullo, Bashy!" said Mabel, and there was annoyance in her voice. "Where did you spring from? I thought you were exploring on the Congo or somewhere."

The man removed his opera hat, squashed it flat, popped it out again, and spoke in a deep, rumbling voice.

"I returned from the Congo this morning. I have been dining with your father and

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mother. They informed me that you had gone to the theatre with this gentleman."

"Mr. Mulliner. My cousin, Bashford Braddock," said Mabel.

"How do you do?" said Osbert.

There was another pause. Bashford Braddock removed his opera hat, squashed it flat, popped it out again, and replaced it on his head. He seemed disappointed that he could not play a tune on it.

"Well, good night," said Mabel.

"Good night," said Osbert.

"Good night," said Bashford Braddock.

The door closed, and Osbert, looking from it to his companion, found that the other was staring at him with a peculiar expression in his eyes. They were hard, shiny eyes. Osbert did not like them.

"Mr. Mulliner," said Bashford Braddock.

"Hullo?" said Osbert.

"A word with you, Mr. Mulliner. I saw all."

"All?"

"All. Mr. Mulliner, you love that girl."

"I do."

"So do I."

"You do?"

"I do."

Osbert felt a little embarrassed. All he could think of to say was that it made them seem like one great big family.

"I have loved her since she was so high."

"How high?" asked Osbert, for the light was uncertain.

"About so high. And I have always sworn that if ever any man came between us; if ever any slinking, sneaking, pop-eyed, lop-eared son of a sea-cook attempted to rob me of that girl, I would——"

"Er—what?" asked Osbert.

Bashford Braddock laughed a short, metallic laugh.

"Did you ever hear what I did to the King of Mgumbo-Mgumbo?"

"I didn't even know there was a King of Mgumbo-Mgumbo."

"There isn't—now," said Bashford Braddock.

Osbert was conscious of a clammy, creeping sensation in the region of his spine.

"What did you do to him?"

"Don't ask."

"But I want to know."

"Far better not. You will find out quite soon enough, if you continue to hang round Mabel Petherick-Soames. That is all, Mr. Mulliner." Bashford Braddock looked up at the twinkling stars. "What delightful weather we are having," he said. "There was just the same quiet hush and peaceful starlight, I recollect, that time out in the Ngobi desert when I strangled the jaguar."

Osbert's Adam's apple slipped a cog.

"W-what jaguar?"

"Oh, you wouldn't know it. Just one of the jaguars out there. I had a rather tricky five minutes of it at first, because my right arm was in a sling and I could only use my left. Well, good night, Mr. Mulliner, good night."

And Bashford Braddock, having removed his opera hat, squashed it flat, popped it out again, and replaced it on his head, stalked off into the darkness.

At the end of five minutes Osbert was surprised to find himself in possession of a smoking-cap, some polo sticks, a ukulele, and a bowl of goldfish

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The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner

FOR several minutes after he had disappeared, Osbert Mulliner stood motionless, staring after him with unseeing eyes. Then, tottering round the corner, he made his way to his residence in South Audley Street and, contriving after three false starts to unlock the front door, climbed the stairs to his cosy library. There, having mixed himself a strong brandy-and-soda, he sat down and gave himself up to meditation; and eventually, after one quick drink and another taken rather slower, was able to marshal his thoughts with a certain measure of coherence. And those thoughts, I regret to say, when marshalled, were of a nature which I shrink from revealing to you.

It is never pleasant, gentlemen, to have to display a relative in an unsympathetic light, but the truth is the truth and must be told. I am compelled, therefore, to confess that my nephew Osbert, forgetting that he was a Mulliner, writhed at this moment in an agony of craven fear.

It would be possible, of course, to find excuses for him. The thing had come upon him very suddenly, and even the stoutest are sometimes disconcerted by sudden peril. Then, again, his circumstances and upbringing had fitted him ill for such a crisis. A man who has been pampered by Fortune from birth becomes highly civilized; and the more highly civilized we are, the less adroitly do we cope with bounders of the Braddock type, who seem to belong to an earlier and rougher age. Osbert Mulliner was simply unequal to the task of tackling cavemen. Apart from some slight skill at contract bridge, the only thing he was really good at was collecting old jade; and what a help that would be, he felt as he mixed himself a third brandy-and-soda, in a personal combat with a man who appeared to think it only sporting to give jaguars a chance by fighting them one-handed.

He could see but one way out of the delicate situation in which he had been placed. To give Mabel Petherick-Soames up would break his heart, but it seemed to be a straight issue between that and his neck, and in this black hour the voting in favour of the neck was a positive landslide. Trembling in every limb, my nephew Osbert went to the desk and began to compose a letter of farewell.

He was sorry, he wrote, that he would be unable to see Miss Petherick-Soames on the morrow, as they had planned, owing to his unfortunately being called away to Australia. He added that he was pleased to have made her acquaintance, and that if, as seemed probable, they never saw each other again, he would always watch her future career with considerable interest.

Signing the letter "Yrs truly, O. Mulliner," Osbert addressed the envelope and, taking it up the street to the post-office, dropped it in the box. Then he returned home and went to bed.

The telephone, ringing by his bedside, woke Osbert at an early hour next morning. He did not answer it. A glance at his watch had told him that the time was half-past eight, when the first delivery of letters is made in London. It seemed only too probable that Mabel, having just received and read his communication, was endeavouring to discuss the matter with him over the wire. He rose, bathed, shaved, and dressed, and had just finished a sombre breakfast when the door opened and Parker, his man,

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announced Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames.

An icy finger seemed to travel slowly down Osbert's backbone. He cursed the preoccupation which had made him omit to instruct Parker to inform all callers that he was not at home. With some difficulty, for the bones seemed to have been removed from his legs, he rose to receive the tall, upright, grizzled, and formidable old man who entered. He had never met Mabel's uncle Masterman, and he wished he was not meeting him now.

However, he rallied himself to play the host.

"Good morning," he said. "Will you have a poached egg?"

"I will not," replied Sir Masterman. "Poached egg, indeed! Poached egg, forsooth! Ha! Tchah! Bah!"

He spoke with such curt brusqueness that a stranger, had one been present, might have supposed him to belong to some league or society for the suppression of poached eggs. Osbert, however, with his special knowledge of the facts, was able to interpret this brusqueness correctly, and was not surprised when his visitor, gazing at him keenly with a pair of steely-blue eyes which must have got him very much disliked in military circles, plunged at once into the subject of the letter.

"Mr. Mulliner, my niece Mabel has received a strange communication from you."

"Oh, she got it all right?" said Osbert, with an attempt at ease.

"It arrived this morning. You had omitted to stamp it. There was threepence to pay."

"Oh, I say, I'm fearfully sorry. Careless of me. I must——"

Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames waved down his apologies.

"It is not the monetary loss which has so distressed my niece, but the letter's contents. My niece is under the impression that last night she and you became engaged to be married, Mr. Mulliner."

Osbert coughed.

"Well — er — not exactly. Not altogether. Not, as it were — I mean — you see——"

"I see very clearly. You have been trifling with my niece's affections, Mr. Mulliner. I am very fond of all my nieces, and I have always sworn that if ever any man trifled with their affections I would——" He broke off and, taking a lump of sugar from the bowl, balanced it absently on the edge of a slice

"What brings you here, Bashford?" asked the General.
"Me? Oh, I looked in to buy a pair of spiked boots. I want to trample on a snake."

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He picked up a leg of mutton and began to gnaw it with an affected daintiness.

of toast. "Did you ever hear of a Captain Walkinshaw?"

"No."

"Captain J. G. Walkinshaw? Dark man with an eyeglass. Used to play the saxophone."

"No."

"Ah! I thought you might have met him. He trifled with the affections of my niece Hester. I horsewhipped him on the steps of the Drones Club. Have you ever heard the name Blenkinsop-Bustard?"

"No."

"Shortly after the affair of Captain Walkinshaw, Rupert Blenkinsop-Bustard trifled with the affections of my niece Gertrude. He was one of the Somersetshire Blenkinsop-Bustards. Wore a fair moustache and kept pigeons. I horsewhipped him on the steps of the Junior Bird-Fanciers. By the way, Mr. Mulliner, what is your club?"

"The United Jade-Collectors," quavered Osbert.

"Has it steps?"

"I—I believe so."

"Good. Good." A dreamy look came into the General's eyes. "Well, the announcement of your engagement to my niece Mabel will appear in to-morrow's *Morning Post*. If it is contradicted—— Well, good morning, Mr. Mulliner, good morning."

And, replacing in the dish the piece of bacon which he had been poising on a teaspoon, Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames left the room.

THE meditation to which my nephew Osbert had given himself up on the previous night was as nothing to the meditation to which he gave himself up now. For fully an hour he must have sat, his head supported by his hands, frowning despairingly at the remains of the marmalade on the plate before him. Though, like all the Mulliners, a clear thinker, he had to confess himself completely nonplussed. The situation had become so complicated that after awhile he went up to the library and tried to work it out on paper, letting x equal himself. But even this brought no solution, and he was still pondering deeply when Parker came up to announce lunch.

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"Lunch?" said Osbert, amazed. "Is it lunch-time already?"

"Yes, sir. And might I be permitted to offer my respectful congratulations and good wishes, sir?"

"Eh?"

"On your engagement, sir. The General happened to mention to me as I let him out that a marriage had been arranged and would shortly take place between yourself and Miss Mabel Petherick-Soames. It was fortunate that he did so, as I was thus enabled to give the gentleman the information he required, when he rang up, straight—as you might say—from the horse's mouth, sir."

"Gentleman? What gentleman?"

"A Mr. Bashford Braddock, sir. He rang up about an hour after the General had left and said he had been informed of your engagement and wished to know if the news was well-founded. I assured him that it was and he said he would be calling to see you later. He was very anxious to know when you would be at home. He seemed a nice, friendly gentleman, sir."

Osbert rose as if the chair in which he sat had suddenly become incandescent.

"Parker!"

"Sir?"

"I am unexpectedly obliged to leave London, Parker. I don't know where I am going—probably the Zambesi or Greenland—but I shall be away a long time. I shall close the house and give the staff an indefinite holiday. They will receive three months' wages in advance, and at the end of that period will communicate with my lawyers, Messrs. Peabody, Thrupp, Thrupp, Thrupp, Thrupp, and Peabody, of Lincoln's Inn. Inform them of this."

"Very good, sir."

"And, Parker."

"Sir?"

"I am thinking of appearing shortly in some amateur theatricals. Kindly step round the corner and get me a false wig, a false nose, some false whiskers, and a good stout pair of blue spectacles."

OSBERT'S plans when, after a cautious glance up and down the street, he left the house an hour later and directed a taxi-cab to take him to an obscure hotel in the wildest and least-known part of the Cromwell Road were of the vaguest. It was only when he reached that haven and had thoroughly wigged, nosed, whiskered, and blue-spectacled himself that he began to formulate a definite plan of campaign. He spent the rest of the day in his room, and shortly before lunch next morning set out for the second-hand clothing establishment of the brothers Cohen near Covent Garden to purchase a complete traveller's outfit. It was his intention to board the boat sailing on the morrow for India and to potter awhile about the world, taking in *en route* Japan, South Africa, Peru, Mexico, China, Venezuela, the Fiji Islands, and other beauty-spots.

All the Cohens seemed glad to see him when he arrived at the shop. They clustered about him in a body, as if guessing by instinct that here came one of those big orders. At this excellent emporium one may buy, in addition to second-hand clothing, practically anything that exists; and the difficulty—for the brothers are all thrustful salesmen—is to avoid doing so. At the end of five minutes Osbert was surprised to find himself in possession of a smoking-cap, three boxes of poker chips, some polo sticks, a fishing-rod, a concertina, a ukulele, and a bowl of goldfish.

He was annoyed. These men appeared to him to have got quite a wrong angle on the situation. They seemed to think that he proposed to make his travels one long round of pleasure. As clearly as he was able, he tried to tell them that in the few broken years that remained to him before a shark or jungle-fever put an end to his sorrows he would have little heart for polo, for poker, or for playing the concertina while watching the gambols of goldfish. They might just as well offer him, he said querulously, a cocked hat or a sewing-machine.

Instant activity prevailed among the brothers.

"Fetch the gentleman his sewing-machine, Isador."

"And, while you're getting him the cocked hat, Lou," said Irving, "ask the gentleman in the shoe department if he'll be kind enough to step this way. You're in luck," he assured Osbert. "If you're going travelling in foreign parts, he's the very gentleman to advise you. You've heard of Mr. Braddock?"

There was very little of Osbert's face visible behind his whiskers, but that little paled beneath its tan.

"Mr. B-Braddock?"

"That's right. Mr. Braddock, the explorer."

"Air!" said Osbert. "Give me air!"

He made rapidly for the door, and was about to charge through when it opened to admit a tall, distinguished-looking man of military appearance.

"Shop!" cried the new-comer in a clear, patrician voice, and Osbert reeled back against a pile of trousers. It was Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames.

A platoon of Cohens advanced upon him, Isador hastily snatching up a fireman's

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helmet and Irving a microscope and a couple of jig-saw puzzles. The General waved them aside.

"Do you," he asked, "keep horsewhips?"

"Yes, sir. Plenty of horsewhips."

"I want a nice strong one with a medium-sized handle and lots of spring," said Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames.

And at this moment Lou returned, followed by Bashford Braddock.

"Is this the gentleman?" said Bashford Braddock genially. "You're going abroad, sir, I understand. Delighted if I can be of any service."

"Bless my soul," said Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames. "Bashford? It's so confoundedly dark in here, I didn't recognize you."

"Switch on the light, Irving," said Isador.

"No, don't," said Osbert. "My eyes are weak."

"If your eyes are weak, you ought not to be going to the tropics," said Bashford Braddock.

"This gentleman a friend of yours?" asked the General.

"Oh, no. I'm just going to help him buy an outfit."

"The gentleman's already got a smoking-cap, poker chips, polo sticks, a fishing-rod, a concertina, a ukulele, a bowl of goldfish, a cocked hat, and a sewing-machine," said Isador.

"Ah!" said Bashford Braddock. "Then all he will require now is a sun helmet, a pair of puttees, and some ointment for alligator bites."

With the rapid decision of an explorer who is buying things for which somebody else is going to pay, he completed the selection of Osbert's outfit.

"And what brings you here, Bashford?" asked the General.

"Me? Oh, I looked in to buy a pair of spiked boots. I want to trample on a snake."

"An odd coincidence. I came here to buy a horsewhip to horsewhip a snake."

"A bad week-end for snakes," said Bashford Braddock.

The General nodded gravely.

"Of course, my snake," he said, "may prove not to be a snake. In classifying him as a snake I may have misjudged him. In that case I shall not require this horsewhip. Still, they're always useful to have about the house."

"Undoubtedly. Lunch with me, General?"

"Delighted, my dear fellow."

"Good-bye, sir," said Bashford Braddock, giving Osbert a friendly nod. "Glad I was able to be of some use. When do you sail?"

"Gentleman's sailing to-morrow morning on the *Rajputana*," said Isador.

"What!" cried Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames. "Bless my soul! I didn't realize you were going to *India*. I was out there for years and can give you all sorts of useful hints. The old *Rajputana*? Why, I know the purser well. I'll come and see you off and have a chat with him. No doubt I shall be able to get you a number of little extra attentions. No, no, my dear fellow, don't thank me. I have a good deal on my mind at the moment, and it will be a relief to do somebody a kindness."

IT seemed to Osbert, as he crawled back to the shelter of his Cromwell Road bedroom, that Fate was being altogether too rough with him. Obviously, if Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames intended to come down to the boat to see him off, it would be madness to attempt to sail. On the deck of a liner under the noonday sun the General must inevitably penetrate his disguise. His whole scheme of escape must be cancelled and another substituted. Osbert ordered two pots of black coffee, tied a wet handkerchief round his forehead, and plunged once more into thought.

It has been frequently said of the Mulliners that you may perplex but you cannot baffle them. It was getting on for dinner-time before Osbert finally decided upon a plan of action; but this plan, he perceived as he examined it, was far superior to the first one.

He had been wrong, he saw, in thinking of flying to foreign climes. For one who desired as fervently as he did never to see Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames again in this world, the only real refuge was a London suburb. Any momentary whim might lead Sir Masterman to pack a suit-case and take the next boat to the Far East, but nothing would ever cause him to take a tram for Dulwich, Cricklewood, Winchmore Hill, Brixton, Balham, or Surbiton. In those trackless wastes Osbert would be safe.

Osbert decided to wait till late at night; then go back to his house in South Audley Street, pack his collection of old jade and a few other necessaries, and vanish into the unknown.

It was getting on for midnight when, creeping warily to the familiar steps, he inserted his latchkey in the familiar keyhole. He had feared that Bashford Braddock might be watching the house, but there were no signs of him. He slipped swiftly into the dark hall and closed the front door softly behind him.

It was at this moment that he became

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aware that from under the door of the dining-room at the other end of the hall there was stealing a thin stream of light.

For an instant this evidence that the house was not, as he had supposed, unoccupied startled Osbert considerably. Then, recovering himself, he understood what must have happened. Parker, his man, instead of leaving as he had been told to do, was taking advantage of his employer's presumed absence from London to stay on and do some entertaining. Osbert, thoroughly incensed, hurried to the dining-room and felt that his suspicion had been confirmed. On the table were set out all the materials, except food and drink, of a cosy little supper for two. The absence of food and drink was accounted for, no doubt, by the fact that Parker and—Osbert saw only too good reason to fear—his lady-friend were down in the larder, fetching them.

Osbert boiled from his false wig to the soles of his feet with a passionate fury. So this was the sort of thing that went on the moment his back was turned, was it? There were heavy curtains hiding the window, and behind these he crept. It was his intention to permit the feast to begin and then, stepping forth like some avenging Nemesis, to confront his erring man-servant and put it across him in no uncertain manner. Bashford Braddock and Major-General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames, with their towering stature and whipcord muscles, might intimidate him, but with a shrimp like Parker he felt that he could do himself justice. Osbert had been through much in the last forty-eight hours, and unpleasantness with a man who, like Parker, stood a mere five feet five in his socks appeared to him rather in the nature of a tonic.

HE had not been waiting long when there came to his ears the sound of footsteps outside. He softly removed his wig, his nose, his whiskers, and his blue spectacles. There must be no disguise to soften the shock when Parker found himself confronted. Then, peeping through the curtains, he prepared to spring.

Osbert did not spring. Instead, he shrank back like a more than ordinarily diffident tortoise into its shell, and tried to achieve the maximum of silence by breathing through his ears. For it was no Parker who had entered, no frivolous lady-friend, but a couple of plug-uglies of such outstanding physique that Bashford Braddock might have been the little brother of either of them.

Osbert stood petrified. He had never seen a burglar before, and he wished, now that he was seeing these, that it could have been arranged for him to do so through a telescope. At this close range they gave him much the same feeling the prophet Daniel must have had on entering the lions' den, before his relations with the animals had been established on their subsequent basis of easy camaraderie. He was thankful that, when the breath which he had been holding for some eighty seconds at length forced itself out in a loud gasp, the noise was drowned by the popping of a cork.

It was from a bottle of Osbert's best Bollinger that this cork had been removed. The marauders, he was able to see, were men who believed in doing themselves well. In these days, when almost everybody is on some sort of diet, it is rarely that one comes across the old-fashioned type of diner who does not worry about balanced meals and calories, but just squares his shoulders and goes at it till his eyes bubble. Osbert's two guests plainly belonged to this nearly obsolete species. They were drinking out of tankards and eating three varieties of meat simultaneously, as if no such thing as a high blood-pressure had ever been invented. A second pop announced the opening of another quart of champagne.

At the outset of the proceedings there had been little or nothing in the way of supper-table conversation. But now, the first keen edge of his appetite satisfied by about three pounds of ham, beef, and mutton, the burglar who sat nearest to Osbert was able to relax. He looked about him approvingly.

"Nice little crib, this, Ernest," he said.

"R!" replied his companion—a man of few words, and those rather hampered by cold potatoes and bread.

"Must have been some real swells in here one time and another."

"R!"

"Baronets and such, I wouldn't be surprised."

"R!" said the second burglar, helping himself to more champagne and mixing in a little port, sherry, Italian vermouth, old brandy, and green Chartreuse to give it body.

The first burglar looked thoughtful.

"Talking of baronets," he said, "a thing I've often wondered is—well, suppose you're having a dinner, see?"

"R!"

"As it might be in this very room."

"R!"

"Well, would a baronet's sister go in before the daughter of the younger son of a peer? I've often wondered about that."

The second burglar finished his champagne, port, sherry, Italian vermouth, old brandy, and green Chartreuse, and mixed himself another.

"Go in?"

"Go in to dinner."

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"I am?"
"Yes, you."
"Who, me?"
"R!"
"Golluping my food?"
"R! Like a pig or something."

It was evident to Osbert, peeping warily through the curtains, that the generous fluids which these two men had been drinking so lavishly had begun to have their effect. They spoke thickly, and their eyes had become red and swollen.

"I may not know all about baronets' younger sisters," said the burglar Ernest, "but I don't gollup my food like pigs or something."

"If she was quicker on her feet, she would."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, she'd get to the door first. Stands to reason."

The first burglar raised his eyebrows.

"Ernest," he said coldly, "you talk like an uneducated son of a what-not. Haven't you never been taught nothing about the rules and manners of good society?"

The second burglar flushed. It was plain that the rebuke had touched a tender spot. There was a strained silence. The first burglar resumed his meal. The second burglar watched him with a hostile eye. He had the air of a man who is waiting for his chance, and it was not long before he found it.

"Harold," he said.

"Well?" said the first burglar.

"Don't gollup your food, Harold," said the second burglar.

The first burglar started. His eyes gleamed with sudden fury. His armour, like his companion's, had been pierced.

"Who's golluping his food?"

"You are."

And, as if to drive home the reproach, he picked up the leg of mutton and began to gnaw it with an affected daintiness.

The next moment the battle had been joined. The spectacle of the other's priggish object-lesson was too much for the burglar Harold. He plainly resented tuition in the amenities from one on whom he had always looked as a social inferior. With a swift movement of the hand he grasped the bottle before him and bounced it smartly on his colleague's head.

Osbert Mulliner cowered behind the curtain. The sportsman in him whispered that he was missing something good, for ring-seats to view which many men would have paid large sums, but he could not nerve himself to look out. However, there was plenty of interest in the thing, even if you merely listened. The bumps and crashes

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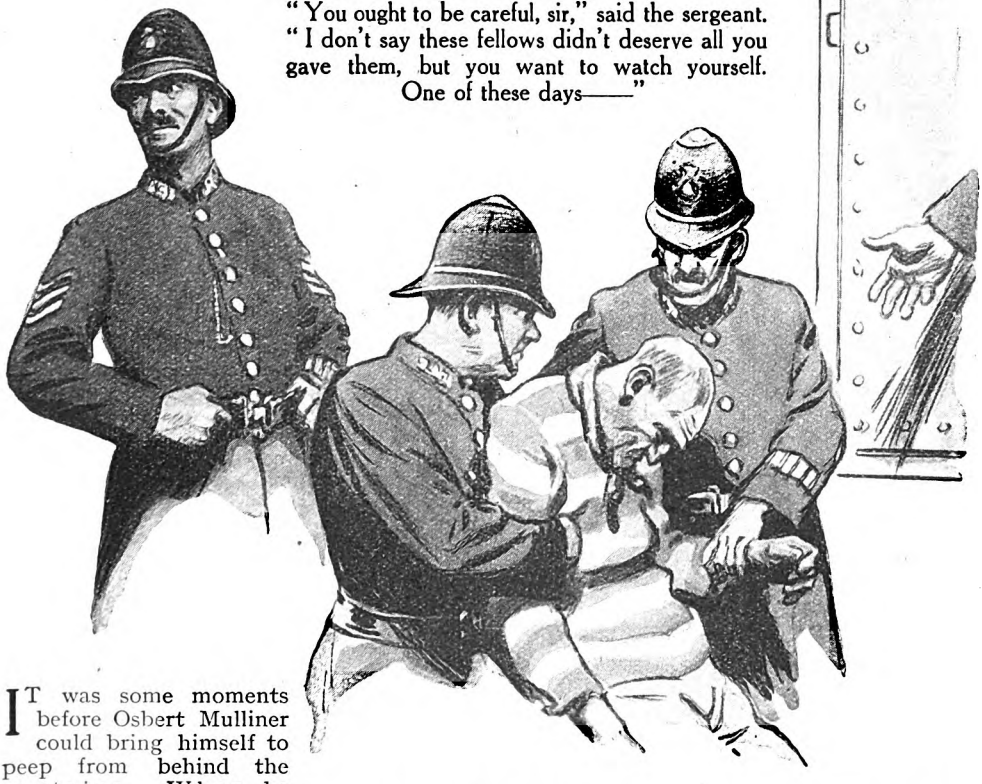
seemed to indicate that the two principals were hitting one another with virtually everything in the room except the wall-paper and the large sideboard. Now they appeared to be grappling on the floor, anon fighting at long range with bottles. Words and combinations of words, of whose existence he had till then been unaware, floated to Osbert's ears; and more and more he asked himself, as the combat proceeded, What would the harvest be?

And then, with one titanic crash, the battle ceased as suddenly as it had begun.



"You ought to be careful, sir," said the sergeant. "I don't say these fellows didn't deserve all you gave them, but you want to watch yourself. One of these days——"

IT was some moments before Osbert Mulliner could bring himself to peep from behind the curtains. When he did so, he seemed to be gazing upon one of those orgy scenes which have done so much to popularize the motion-pictures. Scenically, the thing was perfect. All that was needed to complete the resemblance was a few attractive-looking girls with hardly any clothes on.

He came out and gaped down at the ruins. The burglar Harold was lying with his head in the fireplace; the burglar Ernest was doubled up under the table; and it seemed to Osbert almost absurd to think that these were the same hearty fellows who had come into the room to take pot-luck so short a while before. Harold had the appearance of a man who has been passed through a wringer. Ernest gave the illusion of having recently become entangled in some powerful machinery. If, as was probable, they were known to the police, it would take a singularly keen-eyed constable to recognize them now.

The thought of the police reminded Osbert of his duty as a citizen. He went to the telephone and called up the nearest station and was informed that representatives of the Law would be round immediately to scoop up the remains. He went back to the dining-room to wait, but its atmosphere jarred upon him. He felt the need of fresh air; and, going to the front door, he opened it and stood upon the steps, breathing deeply.

And, as he stood there, a form loomed through the darkness and a heavy hand fell on his arm.

"Mr. Mulliner, I think? Good evening, Mr. Mulliner," said the voice of Bashford Braddock. "A word with you, Mr. Mulliner."

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Osbert returned his gaze without flinching. He was conscious of a strange, almost uncanny calm. The fact was that, everything in this world being relative, he was regarding Bashford Braddock at this moment as rather an undersized little squirt and wondering why he had ever worried about the man. To one who had come so recently from the society of Harold and Ernest, Bashford Braddock seemed like one of Singer's Midgets.

"Ah, Braddock?" said Osbert.

At this moment, with a grinding of brakes, a van stopped before the door and policemen began to emerge.

"Mr. Mulliner?" asked the sergeant.

Osbert greeted him affably.

"Come in," he said. "Come in. Go straight through. You will find them in the dining-room. I'm afraid I had to handle them a little roughly. You had better 'phone for a doctor."

"Bad, are they?"

"A little the worse for wear."

"Well, they asked for it," said the sergeant.

"Exactly," said Osbert.

Bashford Braddock had been standing listening to this exchange of remarks with a somewhat perplexed air.

"What's all this?" he said.

Osbert came out of his thoughts with a start.

"You still here, my dear chap?"

"I am."

"Want to see me about anything? Something on your mind?"

"I just want a quiet five minutes alone with you, Mr. Mulliner."

"Certainly," said Osbert. "Certainly, certainly, certainly. Just wait till these policemen have gone and I will be at your disposal. We have had a little burglary."

"Burg——" Bashford Braddock was beginning, when there came out on to the steps a couple of policemen. They were supporting the burglar Harold, and were followed by others assisting the burglar Ernest. The sergeant, coming last, shook his head at Osbert a little gravely.

"You ought to be careful, sir," he said. "I don't say these fellows didn't deserve all you gave them, but you want to watch yourself. One of these days——"

"Perhaps I did overdo it a little," admitted Osbert. "But I am rather apt to see red on these occasions. Well, good night, sergeant, good night. And now," he said, taking Bashford Braddock's arm in a genial grip, "what was it you wanted to talk to me about? Come into the house. We shall be all alone there. I gave the staff a holiday. There won't be a soul except ourselves."

Bashford Braddock released his arm. He seemed embarrassed. His face, as the light of the street lamp shone upon it, was strangely pale.

"Did you——" He gulped a little. "Was that really you?"

"Really me? Oh, you mean those two fellows? Oh, yes, I found them in my dining-room, eating my food and drinking my wine as cool as you please, and naturally I set about them. But the sergeant was quite right. I *do* get too rough when I lose my temper. I must remember," he said, taking out his handkerchief and tying a knot in it, "to cure myself of that. The fact is, I sometimes don't know my own strength. But you haven't told me what it is you want to see me about."

Bashford Braddock swallowed twice in quick succession. He edged past Osbert to the foot of the steps.

"Oh, nothing, nothing."

"But, my dear fellow," protested Osbert, "it must have been something important to bring you round at this time of night."

Bashford Braddock coughed.

"Well, it was like this. I—er—saw the announcement of your engagement in the paper this morning, and I thought—I—er—just thought I would pop round and ask you what you would like for a wedding present."

"My dear chap! Much too kind of you."

"So—er—so silly if I gave a fish-slice and found that everybody else had given fish-slices."

"That's true. Well, why not come inside and talk it over?"

"No, I won't come in, thanks. Perhaps you will write and let me know. Poste Restante, Bongo on the Congo, will find me. I am returning there immediately."

"Certainly," said Osbert. He looked down at his companion's feet. "My dear chap, what on earth are you wearing those extraordinary boots for?"

"Corns," said Bashford Braddock.

"Why the spikes?"

"They relieve the pressure on the feet."

"I see. Well, good night, Mr. Braddock."

"Good night, Mr. Mulliner."

"Good night," said Osbert.

"Good night," said Bashford Braddock.

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STRAIGHT GRIGGS

By

STACY AUMONIER

Illustrated by
STANLEY LLOYD

THERE was no doubt that the meeting of the parents had been a great success. During their seven years of married life Alec and Barbara Griggs often discussed the regrettable fatality that, when his parents came over on a visit from America to stay with them, her parents always happened to be abroad. In a way it was not surprising, because although old Mr. and Mrs. John Griggs were pretty methodical and punctilious in their way of going on, and always gave plenty of notice of an intending visit, Barbara's father, Colonel Whetstone, was one of those restless old gentlemen with a passion for travel, and his wife shared this enthusiasm. In spite of his seventy-two years he was erect and agile, and if he once got the "go fever," go he must, despite any arrangements that might have been made.

But at last it had come off. Old Mr. and Mrs. Griggs had come from Florida to spend a couple of months, and Colonel and Mrs. Whetstone were at their house across the valley.

It was August, and the visit coincided with that unusual English experience—a heat wave. The weather was indeed glorious. During the day Barbara was fairly occupied with her three children, and Alec motored in to Tellinghurst, where he managed South Downs Agricultural Implements, Ltd. Consequently, the parents were thrown very much together. At first Barbara was in a fever of apprehension. One never knew who was going to get on with whom, did one? But her mind was soon set at rest. Mrs. Griggs and Mrs. Whetstone, drawn together instinctively by the adoration of their children and grandchildren, were soon immersed in each other's company, whilst the two men struck up an immediate intimacy. Both had travelled and knocked about the world, and sitting side by side in the shade during the day, or on the veranda at night, these two, the Colonel with his pipe and John Griggs with an endless procession of formidable-looking black cigars, would yarn and discuss world affairs all day and half through the night (if they were allowed to by their women folk). Barbara was delighted. The whole thing was a great success.

Alec's position at the Agricultural Implement works was a good one and the firm was prospering, but neither he nor his wife made any pretence to their neighbours that it was his income which supported and sustained Westling, one of the most beautiful houses in the whole of the Sussex weald. High up, but protected on the north and east by a thick belt of pine trees, it faced south, with a glorious view right down the Tellinghurst valley towards the sea. It had been a farm-house in a very dilapidated condition when the Griggses bought it, but had been restored and enlarged by Lutyens. It showed that scholarly reverence for tradition, combined with the happy application of material, breadth, airiness, comfort, and fine proportion, which one associates with that eminent architect. It had a sunk rose garden, a Dutch garden, a bathing pool, and two tennis courts. Perhaps its most attractive feature, however, was the broad terrace in front of the dining-room. On this was set a limewood pergola, over which trailed azaleas, clematis, and jasmine. The ground was flagged with broad rough stones between which grew exquisite little crimson, white, and blue rock flowers.

It was, of course, Alec's father, John Griggs, who had paid for all this. He was known to be a very rich man, and Alec was the only child. The Griggses were very popular on the countryside, and though many may have been envious, no one begrudged Alec "an American millionaire"

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father, especially as the hospitality at Westling was notorious. Whether old John Griggs was actually a millionaire or not need not concern us. He was certainly a very rich man, but what the natives of Tellinghurst and district did not know—or only a few of them knew—was that, although he was an American, he was only an American by naturalization. He was born and had spent the first twenty-three years of his life in England. Indeed, many Englishmen took him to task for thus forswearing the land of his birth, but his argument was that, although his heart was loyal enough to the motherland, you could not spend over forty years in a country, enjoy all its opportunities of advancement, and make your fortune there without ceding it whatever benefits your citizenship might afford. America had made him, and he was, moreover, indebted to it for the most priceless asset of his career—his wife, the daughter of a professor of physics at Columbia University.

No one seemed to know the details of John Griggs's chequered career. He had been most things. But it was at St. Louis that he had laid the foundation of his fortune, first in connection with a bleaching business and then through a patent of his own known as Griggs's Fertilizer. It was in this city, too, that he acquired a sobriquet which had stuck to him ever since: "Straight Griggs." No one was prouder of this title than Alec, his son. If his father had handed down to him one of the most honoured titles in the British Peerage it would not have given him such a thrill of pride as this simple and well-earned description of his father's character. If his proprietorial conscience sometimes smote him a little when he looked around the beautiful house and grounds of Westling, he consoled himself with the reflection that his possession of them was a source of infinite gratification to the man who had really bought and paid for that possession —"Straight Griggs."

During the first fortnight, owing to the excessive heat, the Griggses hardly went outside the grounds, but the Colonel and his wife, who were used to tropical climates, would come over in the afternoon, and very often in the early part of the evening the two elderly gentlemen would have a game of bowls, before settling down to their usual evening's "powwow." In the third week the Colonel had to go up to London for four or five days to attend one or two committee meetings. John went with him in the car to the station, and their parting had quite a note of melancholy regret. The Colonel said he was afraid he would find the club he was staying at extremely boring after their delightful talks; while John said feelingly that he would be all the time looking forward to his friend's return.

NOW, if there was one feature about Griggs which had impressed the Colonel more than another, it was his innate buoyancy of disposition. It was a quality which conveyed itself to the listener. His eyes were the eyes of an incurable optimist. And when he spoke, in spite of his sixty-five years, the bulk of which had been spent struggling against adversity, his voice had almost a boyish ring. He was full of enthusiasms, sensitive to impressions, and eager to listen. It is advisable to keep these facts in mind in gauging the Colonel's apprehensions on the night of his return. He had parted with "Straight Griggs" in the manner described, and with these impressions of him indelibly graven on his mind. But on the Friday night when he returned he was conscious of a subtle change in his friend. It was not very marked, but it was there—quite definitely. He was just as affable, just as prepared to talk and to listen, but his manner was preoccupied. Some of his buoyancy had gone, some of his enthusiasm. He was not talking quite so well, or listening quite so well. Perhaps it was the heat. Sometimes during the evening his eyes would wander. When they were seated on the terrace he would let those terrible black cigars of his go out and then restlessly light another. When the Colonel was talking to him he would suddenly turn and look down the valley, and the Colonel knew that there was something on his mind. Moreover, it was something which had happened during his absence. He made occasion to take Barbara on one side, but she knew nothing. There had been no mail in from America during his absence. The Griggses had received no letters. How had they spent their time? Well, Mrs. Griggs had hardly been out of the grounds, but Mr. Griggs had taken the car out on two afternoons and gone for a turn round the country, nowhere special that she knew of. The Colonel was perplexed. He returned to the terrace and found his friend still sitting alone in the dark. He determined to be as matter-of-fact as possible. Perhaps this mood would pass.

"Well, John," he said breezily, "I hear you have been for a run or two in my absence. Where did you get to?"

Without moving his cigar Griggs mumbled: "Oh, one or two round trips—nowhere special. Except——"

He paused, and looked away down the valley.

"I got to the sea, and took a look at Ticehurst and Brynne—came back

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When Griggs had lighted a fresh cigar he leaned forward confidentially towards the Colonel.

through Wantney and Glendisham—nowhere special——"

There was an awkward little interval. The Colonel wanted to hear more of the story of these wanderings, but he felt that any interruption might snap their flow. He merely murmured: "Um—um," and refilled his pipe. Then John suddenly got up and appeared to stroll casually to the window that looked into the drawing-room. The rest of the family had just settled down to what had become an evening ritual—a few casual rubbers of bridge. It was essentially a family game, in which the three ladies talked all the time about dressmaking and the bringing up of children, Alec behaved like a cheerful martyr, and no one seemed to know whose deal it was, or what were trumps, or what the score was. John's return to his seat had a more furtive character. He almost tip-toed. When he had lighted a fresh cigar he leaned forward confidentially towards the Colonel, and the latter noticed that his eyes had an unusual brightness.

"Colonel," he said quietly, "as you pass through Glendisham going east there is a broad stretch of marshland on your left, but the road leads up through a pine wood to Worsleydale Common. But looking down through the trees you can just see the roofs of a long stretch of rambling buildings, built of granite and slate-coloured brick."

He stopped, and looked at the Colonel as though asking a question. The latter nodded his head and said almost under his breath:—

"Yes, that's right. Deadmoor prison."

John Griggs turned his head from left to right and back again, like a large benevolent-looking eagle. He seemed to be assuring himself thoroughly that he had heard aright. When he spoke again his voice had a husky quality.

"Deadmoor! Yes, I—I knew it was."

The Colonel felt himself on peculiarly delicate ground. His upbringing decreed that the poking of one's nose into another man's private affairs was a detestable form of ill-breeding. On the other hand, here was a fellow-creature—and one for whom he had developed an affection—obviously anxious to relieve himself of some oppressive mental load. After a decent interval he said as casually as he could:—

"You—you knew of it, then?"

There was an obvious sense of relief about the face of "Straight Griggs." He seemed to rejoice that the question had been put to him so squarely, that, in fact, the issue had

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become so defined. Leaning towards his friend, he said in a deep, clear voice :—

"*I escaped from there forty-one years ago last fall.*"

THE two men looked at each other closely. It was the Colonel who was the more disturbed. He gasped, and repeated under his breath :—

"Good God! Good God!"

Griggs added calmly, as though meditating :—

"I don't know how the law stands. Whether there's a time limit or what. But I suppose if they knew they would put me back."

At this astounding revelation the Colonel gave a quick apprehensive glance at the beautiful house, silhouetted against the night sky. Through the open window came the sound of Alec's laughter, and his voice :—

"Come on, mother, you owe me one-and-threepence. Pay up!"

Griggs spoke more quickly, as though anxious to bridge the chasm that was suddenly yawning between them.

"You will first of all, of course, wonder what I was doing in prison. I will tell you in a few sentences. My father died just after I came down from Oxford—my mother had died when I was a small boy. He left me what seemed to be a pretty considerable fortune—about thirty-two thousand pounds. I was young, high-spirited, and I had no ties. I immediately proceeded to do all those things which dashing youth regards as 'living.' As you may imagine, I had no lack of friends and acquaintances eager to help me in my anxiety to dissipate this fortune. Without, I hope, being vulgarly excessive, I did most of the usual things—travelled luxuriously, entertained, and gambled. Incidentally, I'm afraid I gave a lot away to worthless people.

"Anyway, at the end of eighteen months I was astonished to find that my capital of thirty-two thousand pounds had been reduced to rather less than six thousand pounds! It was then that I began to make up my mind to pull myself together. This wouldn't do. I must settle down and find remunerative employment. And it was then, unfortunately, that I came in touch with Millingham. Millingham was one of the most ingratiating people I have ever met. He was tall, good-looking, and about twenty years older than I. We met, I remember, at a coffee-stall about five o'clock one morning. I told him a good deal about my position, and afterwards went back with him to his flat in Golden Square. Millingham, it seemed, had a successful outside broker's business in the City. To cut it short, he persuaded me to join him, and I put four thousand pounds into his business. I was to have a salary of one thousand pounds a year and a liberal percentage on the profits. The job suited me admirably. I could live comfortably on one thousand pounds a year. I was learning a business, and I was still my own master. I'm afraid dancing and other dissipations of youth still claimed a lot of my time, and my hours at the office were rather irregular. Nevertheless, I did a certain amount of work, and the whole thing seemed to be going swimmingly.

"IT was two years later that the dreadful crash occurred. It was September, and I was going away with a friend to Norway, fishing, for a month. On the day of my departure I lunched with Millingham. We lunched lavishly, I remember—cocktails, champagne, and liqueurs. His hospitality knew no bounds. About an hour before my train was due to depart he suddenly said :—

"'Why, you never signed those Tilbury and Co. documents. I must have your signature before you go. If we take a taxi now you have just time to pop into the office and then have plenty of time for your train.' I nearly said: 'What are the Tilbury and Co. documents?' but I wasn't sufficiently interested. My mind was on fjords and fishing. We dashed into the office. I signed everything he put before me, about eight documents in all. His signature was already on them. I caught my train. I had a grand time in Norway. It was perhaps as well, for the day after I returned I was arrested.

"It seemed that I had put my signature to what was nothing more than an appalling kind of bucket-shop swindle. It came out at the trial that Millingham's real name was Malini. He had done this kind of thing once before in New York. He got seven years, and I have never seen him since. As for me, what could I say or do? As you know, ignorance is no excuse in the eyes of the law. I did not even claim not to have read the documents I signed. I made no defence. Legally I had none. On account of my youth, and the fact that I was probably influenced by my senior partner, I was let off with two years.

"Gee! but I *was* young in those days. I was sent to Wandsworth first, and when I found myself in that forbidding prison I set my teeth, and determined to go through with it. I would make good somehow. I didn't *feel* a criminal, that was the great thing, and I was young and buoyant. At the end of four months I was transferred to Deadmoor. Deadmoor was a less depressing prison than Wandsworth, but, golly! how

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the time dragged! The dreadful monotony of that routine, and then the—how can I describe it?—kind of filthy undercurrent of confirmed vice running through the bulk of that unhappy crowd. I lie awake at night now sometimes and think of it. It's horrible. Living in it you gradually feel it gripping you. I don't pretend to know what can be done, but the system's wrong."

Griggs licked his dry lips, and frowned into the darkness.

"IT was about six months later that the idea of escape occurred to me. There was a saying that no man had ever escaped from Deadmoor. I can quite believe it. I had very little real hope of escaping. But I felt that the mere effort of trying—however much I was punished for it afterwards—might sustain my momentary interest in life and stimulate my self-respect. I began to take my bearings. At that time I was put to work making mail-bags in a large building near the centre of the prison. I was passed daily from my cell to the exercise yard, and then to the mail-bag building, and so back again to my cell, always, of course, under the eyes of warders. I could not see the slightest loophole of hope. The outer wall of the prison was a most formidable-looking structure, about sixteen feet high and crowned with a close array of steel spikes. About the end of October, however, I was transferred for two days a week to the laundry sheds. Our 'working party' consisted of about fifteen convicts, and in a long black shed near the south wall we did all the laundry work of the prison. On the second occasion of my visit there I began to take an alert interest in certain possibilities that this new situation offered. The windows of this shed faced north. The door was on the east side. But on the south side, where there were no windows, there was a space of less than twenty yards between the shed and the outside wall. In this space we used to hang out clothes to dry on clothes-lines. I noticed when I was out there that the position was not overlooked at all except for certain upper cells never occupied in daytime and by the back windows of the sanatorium. But it was, I think, those attractive lengths of clothes-line that put temptation into a young fellow's head.

"I came to the conclusion that this was one of those things that wanted doing without too much planning and forethought. It must be like an act of inspiration done at the exact psychological moment. It came a fortnight later. It was early November, late in the afternoon, and already getting dark. There was a slight mist about. I was sent out to collect some roller towels that had been out there all the afternoon. I found myself alone in this secluded space. Looking back on it after all these years I simply gasp at my own coolness and audacity. Without a moment's hesitation I untied about twenty feet of clothes-line. In a few seconds I had made a noose at the end of it. I flung it up to the spikes. At my third attempt the noose caught over one of the spikes. I then tied one of the roller towels loosely round my neck—an inspiration this, as you shall see—it was again only a few seconds before I was at the top of that wall. But it was then that my more serious difficulties began.

"In the first place, although in the yard below I was not exposed, up here I seemed to be silhouetted against the sky-line for the whole country to see. I was visible from the upper part of the deputy governor's house, the doctor's house, the sanatorium, and various parts of the prison grounds. It seemed incredible that I was not immediately spotted. But I was too occupied to worry about this. My position was perilous. The slightest slip, and I should be impaled on those spikes. There was no space for a foothold, and it looked utterly impossible to leap clear of that wall, which appeared to slope outwards. It was then that my towel came in. I suppose it was again only seconds, but it seemed an eternity while I twisted it into a kind of pad. This I perched myself on gingerly on the top of the spikes. There was still no chance of jumping, so I simply let myself slither down the side of the wall. I fell with an unholy crash. When I reached the bottom the skin was torn off both my hands and arms, and my legs and body were badly cut and bruised, but I realized that no bones were actually broken. I staggered to my feet and ran.

"It is a curious fact, when I look back on it, and I won't say whether I should take credit for it or not, but during the whole of that night's proceedings I never felt any fear. I reckoned the odds against me about ten thousand to one. I made up my mind to regard it as a kind of gallop and not to be broken-hearted when they caught me. Sportsmen aver that the fox enjoys the chase. I don't know anything about that, but I know that I got a curious kind of thrill out of it. I seemed to regard myself in a detached way, like a man looking down from a race-stand on an outsider he has backed.

"Going direct south led, I knew, to the marsh, so I just ran till I was out of sight, then I made a wide detour and worked my way to the north side of the prison. As you know, about half a mile north is a pine wood

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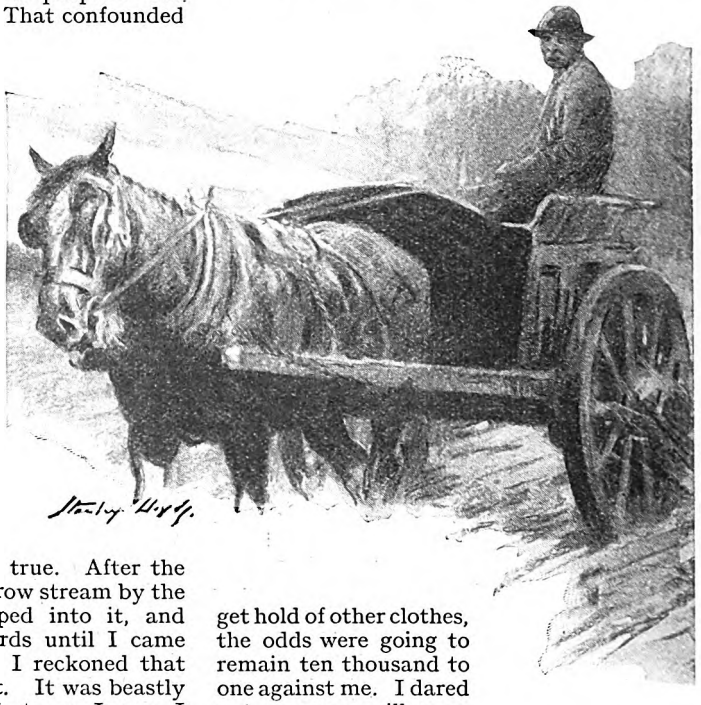
as the gradient of the hill begins to get steeper. As I say, it was getting dark, and I reckoned if I could make that wood before they caught me, my chances would improve considerably. The trouble was I had to keep on stopping, hiding and dodging, because there were a few stray people about. But I must have had a good quarter of an hour start before the gun went off. I knew what that meant, but the immediate danger was that it made the people I was likely to meet more alert. That confounded prison garb!

"But my luck held. I knew if I could make the wood, so far as men were concerned, I could give them a good run for their money for that night anyway; but what I didn't like the thought of was *dogs*, which I knew they sometimes used on these occasions. Just before reaching the wood I had to cross a road and an open field. A cart came blundering along the road, and I crouched down under a hedge. While hiding there a sound reached my ears which gave me a certain satisfaction — the sound of trickling water. It was true. After the cart had gone I found a narrow stream by the side of the field. I stepped into it, and waded over a hundred yards until I came to the edge of the wood. I reckoned that might put the dogs off a bit. It was beastly cold and uncomfortable, but, as I say, I was young in those days. In the wood I had a good drink of water and a rest. Whether they used dogs or not I cannot say. I heard no sound of them. In fact, I heard nothing of my pursuers that night. I did not run any more, but walked quickly, keeping my eyes and ears on the alert. I walked for about another two hours, and then had a rest on a fallen tree trunk. I felt it necessary to have a kind of committee meeting of one. The trouble was I didn't know the country at all, or where I was, or in which direction I was going. Not that this knowledge would have been of very much use to me.

"The night was dark, but although one's eyes get used to it, it was impossible to see more than one's immediate surroundings. I could, however, just tell whether I was on a road or a common. After a time I decided to stick to a narrow road. A road in any case must lead in one direction, and I knew I was heading north. If I met anyone with a lantern or a lighted cart or trap, I hid in the hedge, otherwise I did not hesitate to call out a cheery 'Good night!' to passing travellers. The sound of my own voice gave me confidence. You must remember there were no motor-cars in those days! I was beginning to get very hungry, and coming to a field I grubbed up a swede and ate it. It was better than nothing. I could see that my most urgent problem was going to be that of clothes. Unless I could



get hold of other clothes, the odds were going to remain ten thousand to one against me. I dared not go near a village or habitation. It would mean hiding in the daytime and travelling at night, both at great risk. And where and to what end was I to travel? In the meantime, how was I to live? With a change of clothes I could take risks. It wouldn't be fatal to be merely seen. I don't know how long I plunged on through the darkness.

"Sometimes I tried to approach some sleeping farm, but I was invariably scared by the barking of dogs. But passing along my lane at some unholy hour of the night I caught sight of a long, bungalow-looking building almost hidden amidst trees. There appeared to be a few dim lights about the place. I determined to reconnoitre, and, avoiding the carriage drive which led up to it, I got through the hedge and approached it Indian fashion, moving noiselessly from cover to cover. When I got near enough I could see that it had the character of a hospital or sanatorium. Not a very suitable place to burgle, you may say, but still

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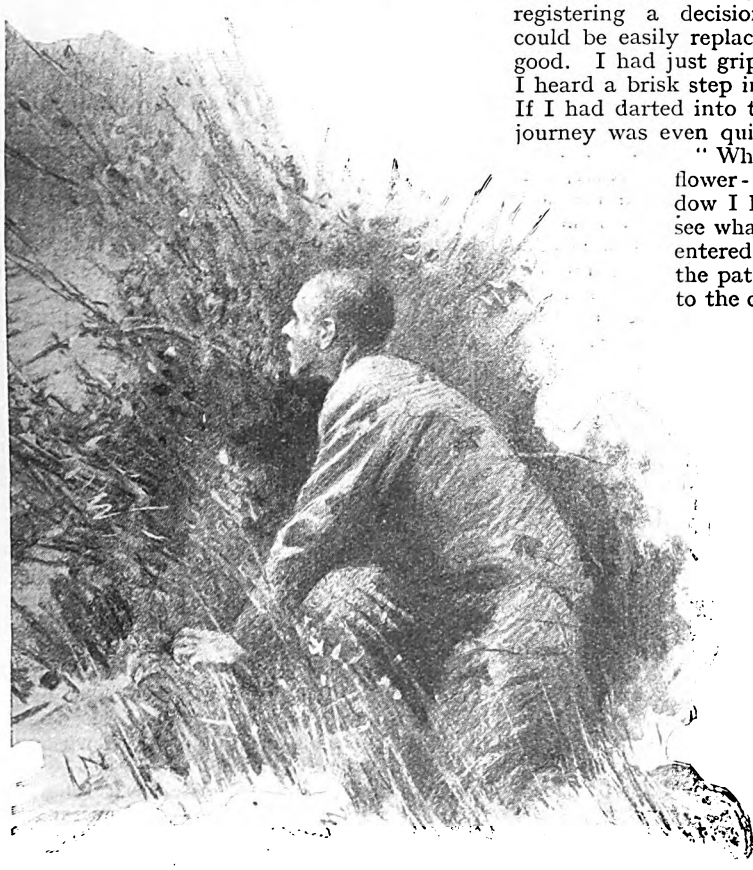
it held out the possibilities of my most vital need—clothes. When I got to the gravel path that ran all round the outside, I took off my boots. I then went carefully across it and approached a window. To my surprise the window was open about two feet at the bottom, and the room was dimly lighted by a gas-jet. My first glance told me that my surmise was correct—it was a hospital, apparently a small private hospital. In this room were three beds,



"A cart came blundering along the road, and I crouched down under a hedge."

only one of which was occupied, and that at the far end by a man who was asleep. I tried to take in the details of the room, and suddenly my heart gave a jump. On a chair at the end of the man's bed, and neatly folded up, was a suit of clothes and a collar and shirt!

"Acting on my inspirational policy I was through that window like a knife. I shot silently to the end of the room and gripped my treasure. As I lifted it I caught sight of a small pile of money on the mantelpiece. It is amazing how quickly one's mind acts in cases of this kind. During my stay in prison I had vowed to myself again and again that when I regained my freedom I would never do a thing that was not meticulously honest and straightforward, and here I was, after a few hours' liberty, committing a deliberate burglary! At the same time my instinct of self-preservation was telling me that in this lay my one chance in the ten thousand, while my mind was registering a decision that these trifles could be easily replaced when I had made good. I had just gripped the money when I heard a brisk step in the passage outside. If I had darted into the room, my outward journey was even quicker.

"When I alighted on the flower-bed outside the window I had to peep back to see what happened. A nurse entered, and after glancing at the patient she went straight to the chair where the clothes had lain! Then she stopped and looked puzzled. She looked on the floor, at the patient, and then around the room. She was obviously bewildered. Without waiting for her bewilderment to develop into suspicion of an outside burglary I crossed the gravel path, collected my boots, sprinted across the garden, got through the hedge, and in a few minutes' time was among the furze bushes of an adjoining common. It was an unpleasantly cold night to change one's clothes in the open, but excitement kept me warm. I had no matches and I could not see how much the money amounted to. But this seemed of less importance than the clothes. They fitted me quite well, and I stuffed the convict garb as far up as I could into a rabbit hole.

"After walking on for another half-hour there seemed to be no point in plunging about in the dark, so I leant against a tree and tried to get a little sleep.

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"I MUST have slept an hour or two, for when I awoke there was a glimmer of light in the sky, which served the useful purpose of enabling me to locate the east. I was soon able to count my stolen money. There was a sovereign, a half-sovereign, and eight shillings in silver. A very useful accretion of capital upon which to start my new career!

"I was feeling stiff and very hungry, but when I looked at my new brown suit my spirits rose. I should now have to risk entering a town or village. I washed my face in a stream and did my hair as well as I could with my fingers. I was bothered by having no hat. Not that I particularly wanted to wear one, but in those days "the hatless brigade" was almost unknown, and I feared that this little defect might make me conspicuous. I decided, however, that when I came to a town I would amble along the streets very slowly with my hands in my pockets, as though I had just strolled out of a house. I made for a road, and after walking rather less than a mile I found myself coming to the outskirts of what appeared to be a fair-sized town. It turned out afterwards to be Brindlehampton.

"I passed a policeman, who I thought looked at me questioningly. I ambled by him, whistling, and to my relief found that he was not following me. The shops were shut, but a little farther on I came to a sight which gladdened me—a cheap eating-house for carters and market people. I strolled in and sat down and a girl came up to serve me. I ordered two fried eggs, some grilled ham, bread, butter, marmalade, and a pot of coffee. Oh, that breakfast! During the whole course of my life I have never enjoyed such a meal. Afterwards I strolled out and bought cigarettes and matches. I then came across a hosier's. There I invested in a three-and-ninepenny felt hat and a walking-stick. The walking-stick was a luxury, but I felt it added conviction to my make-up. I looked at myself in the long mirror. In my brown suit, collar, tie, felt hat, with a cane hanging over my arm and a cigarette in the corner of my mouth, there was nothing about me to betoken the convict. Strolling up the town, my body sated with good food and hot coffee, the odds of ten thousand to one against me suddenly seemed to shift to a good level chance. Such is youth!"

"Straight Griggs" sighed. During the whole course of this narrative the Colonel could not but be impressed by the extraordinary simplicity of the narrator. Having decided to tell the story, he never hesitated. He seemed to be living through the exploits of that night all over again, and although he must have done so a thousand times, the recounting of them appeared to give him a certain boyish satisfaction. On account of "youth" he had nothing to sigh about.

"I knew, of course, that the safest place in the wide world to hide in was London, and thither I made my way. I even had the audacity to ask a policeman the way to the station, and when he addressed me as 'sir' I thrilled with delight. I really wonder I didn't travel up first class. In London I made for the inconspicuous neighbourhood of Camden Town, and took a furnished bedroom in a meagre street. I paid the landlady a week's rent in advance and told her my luggage was on its way from Scotland. It was impossible, of course, to make any definite plans. My immediate problem was to remain hidden until the keenness on my search had somewhat abated. Later on I might manage to get out of the country. In the meantime it would be necessary to get some kind of job—however menial—in order to keep body and soul together, and at the same time not to mix among a crowd of men, any one of whom might recognize me from my photograph which had appeared in the newspapers. I must say I had managed to alter my appearance pretty considerably from the photograph.

"My luck was in. Two days later I heard from a man on a seat in the park about a big rush order a large firm of stationers were dealing with for some Continental Government. They wanted men for all-night work. I called and applied and was taken on at once without any question of reference or character. My job consisted mostly in folding circulars, putting them in envelopes and stacking them. I had to work on a nine-hour night shift and I was paid twenty-five shillings a week. A hard job, you may say, but I realized that I was lucky. I saw no one but a few down-and-out scallawags like myself.

"Towards the end of the week I had a queer little experience. Every evening I used to go for a two hours' walk before going on duty. I walked about the streets, avoiding the more conspicuous and well-lighted thoroughfares, but I enjoyed this plunge into adventure. One night I went as far as Oxford Street. I was walking briskly down Margaret Street when a man who was passing me stopped and exclaimed: 'Good God!' My heart gave a violent jump as I looked up. It was Rusbridger. Rusbridger had been one of my pals in the old halcyon days. He was a good chap, but a bit reckless, and, unfortunately, a bit of a drunkard. Many a wild night had we had together. Almost instinctively he said: 'Come and have a drink, old boy.' I hesitated. Rusbridger made the situation

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a little more dangerous. At the same time I was in no position to flout a man who might be friendly towards me at that moment.

"A few minutes later we were in the corner of a saloon bar. Rusbridger knew that I had escaped from prison, and of course he wanted me to tell him everything. I realized that he only meant well, but I also realized that he was a dangerous man to tell things to. He was obviously rather thrilled at the adventure of meeting an escaped convict, but I was certain that in his cups he would go and tell others all about me, and they would tell others, and eventually the wrong person would get to know. I showed my delight at his friendly greeting, but I was a bit evasive. At last he remembered he had an appointment.

"We went out, and he hailed a hansom cab and got in. Just as he was saying good-bye he thrust his hand in my top waistcoat pocket and said: 'Well, good luck, old boy!' When he had driven off I found two five-pound notes in my pocket.

"During the next few days I developed a new obsession. I kept on thinking of the man in the hospital whose suit I was wearing, and whose thirty-eight shillings I had stolen. I felt an overwhelming desire to pay him back while I had the opportunity. With Rusbridger it was different. I could regard the ten pounds as a gift (he had meant it as such), or, knowing his address, I could pay him back at any time. I decided to devote the week-end to this act of atonement. We did not have to work on Saturday night, but were supposed to begin again on Sunday night. On Saturday morning I took the train down to Brindlehampton. I wanted to be there in good time, for this reason: I should have to restore the stolen property after dark, I did not know the name of the hospital, and was not quite certain of its position; I wanted to take my bearings in daylight. I decided to stay at a cheap little commercial hotel, to buy a ready-made suit in the town, to change, make a parcel of the brown suit, put the money in an envelope inside, and then—if I had any luck—just drop it through the open window.

"There was one thing causing me considerable perturbation. For the last two days I had been feeling far from well, and when I reached Brindlehampton on the Saturday morning I was feeling much worse. This was the eleventh day after my escape from prison. I booked my room at the hotel, and then started out to try to rediscover the hospital. I thought I would leave buying the suit till I got back. I reached the outskirts of the town and then realized that it was not going to be any good. My head and back ached and I could hardly see which way I was going from giddiness. Somehow I managed to get back to the hotel, and when I got there I just had the wit to tell the proprietor that I was unwell and going to bed, and I thought I had better have a doctor.

"It was as well I did. I don't remember the doctor coming. I know I had a very high temperature and was delirious. I think they gave me sleeping-draughts. I seemed to be in a stage of unconsciousness for an interminable, wretched time. At one time I knew they were carrying me on a stretcher. I got it into my head they were going to bury me, thinking I was dead. I cried out and struggled. There was a long interval of blackness after that. Then one night I seemed to emerge and look around me. And do you know where I found myself?"

JOHN GRIGGS shook his long index finger, as though lecturing a small boy. "I found myself in the same room from which I had stolen the clothes! There was the same man asleep in the corner bed, and I was occupying the bed next to his. Almost instinctively I looked round for some sign of the police. 'They've got me all right,' I thought. But there was no sign of police. After a time that same nurse entered the room. She came up and smiled. Close to, I could see she had a kind face. She gave me something to drink, and I whispered: 'Where am I, nurse?' She wouldn't tell me at first, but after a time I got it out of her. I was in a *smallpox isolation hospital!* To cut this part of the story short for your benefit, for twelve days I had been wearing the suit just removed from the smallpox patient in the bed next to me! On the night of my burglary, when I had looked back through the window and saw the nurse enter, she had just come to take all his things to the disinfecting chamber. Of course I did not learn this at the time. I pieced it all together afterwards.

"During my moments of consciousness in the next few days I tried to anticipate the result of my burglary of the smallpox hospital. Would it lead to my apprehension? There was nothing at present to suggest that I was under suspicion. I had given a false name at the hotel, of course, and was supposed to be a commercial traveller. I gathered from the nurse that there had been a mild epidemic of smallpox in the country recently, but it was well in hand. In this hospital there were only my room companion and myself, but there were seven women cases in the other section. She told me that my case was considered a mild one, but that my companion was very

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bad. The doctor, who visited me twice a day, was kindness itself.

"But what about the suit? I kept on thinking. When I was brought in and undressed, did either the nurse or my fellow-patient recognize it? The latter I could almost dismiss without question. He was in no state to worry about a suit of clothes. As to the nurse, I guessed that she would have been too occupied at the time of the undressing, and if afterwards it struck her that there was something familiar about the suit, she would hardly suspect it could be the same one. This would be stretching the large arm of coincidence too far. Besides, there is not as a rule anything peculiarly striking about a man's clothes. She may not even have observed it very closely before. In this surmise I discovered afterwards that I was correct. But who would get the suit of clothes when we got well? It would, I presume, be brought to me. But then, of course, would come the danger. I could assume that by that time my fellow-patient would be much better and alert. He would assuredly recognize the suit. Then how could I explain? It is wonderful how when one is ill one's imagination seems to become so active over trifles.

"I lay there for hours during both the day and the night, tossing about, and visualizing all kinds of compromising situations arising out of the brown suit. At the end of another ten days, however, I gave up worrying, and I noticed that my companion was beginning to show signs of some slight improvement. He had nodded and smiled at me on several occasions, and at last we began to have brief whispered conversations. I learnt that his name was Broome. He was only a few years older than I, and had followed several trades. Lately he had been quite successful, I gathered, as a dealer in brass furnishings, had saved a little money, and was talking of going out to Canada as soon as he was well enough.

"As the weeks went by it became more and more obvious that, in spite of the fact that I did not enter the hospital till twelve days after Broome, so far as condition was concerned I had already overhauled him. His face was still a dreadful sight. I came through it with only these few little scars on my left chin, and many people now do not recognize them for what they are."

"I certainly had not," remarked the Colonel.

"Broome, nevertheless, was quite hopeful. He had no idea how ill he was. When he found a difficulty in writing he got me to attend to his correspondence. There was always a certain amount of trouble over this. They did not mind us receiving letters, but everything we sent out had to be carefully disinfected and so on, and so they didn't encourage us.

"At the end of two months the doctor said that in ten days' time they would be able to let me go. My mind became active with plans for the future. What on earth was I to do? I realized that I was a fool to have escaped from prison. I had only had about another nine months to serve, and then I could have started out to work out my own salvation in my own way. But as it was I had contracted this filthy disease and was liable to arrest at any moment. If caught all this period of liberty would be set against me and I should get a further stretch as a punishment. It was, moreover, almost inevitable that I should eventually be caught. In any case, I could make no kind of honourable and successful career. My only hope lay in being able to get out of the country.

"When I told Broome they were going to let me go he somehow or other got it into his head that he was to be released on the same date, and began to make his plans accordingly. He got me to write to a shipping company for him and book a passage to Quebec. This was for just three weeks hence. I also wrote and got hold of a passport which he already possessed. Broome became tremendously excited. He had, I gathered, saved quite a useful sum of money, and he had apparently no one dependent on him. He was full of the fortune he was going to make as a brass furnisher in Canada. He would talk far into the night, with corresponding rises of temperature. The doctors could not make out what was the matter with him. It went on for a week like this, and then the thing happened which was to affect my whole career. Broome died. A curious chap, and I can't profess to have felt any special interest in him, beyond the fact that he left in my possession a passport and a second-class ticket from London to Quebec!

"Three days later I calmly donned the brown suit again and strolled out to the cab that was to take me to Brindlehampton Station. I had a few busy days in London. The first was devoted to getting an interview with Rusbridger. The good chap lent me fifty pounds. And so, one morning, I turned up with a cabin trunk and a valise for the boat train to Liverpool. I felt full of confidence. It was three months since I had escaped from prison, and the search for me had probably relaxed, and the attack of smallpox had altered my appearance, to say nothing of the fact that I had grown a beard. In any case, I found myself ten days later a free man walking the streets of Quebec.

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with an account of my life until I did make good. In no case was it very interesting. Of course, I had my ups and downs, but generally speaking I was lucky from the first. I worked hard, and discovered that I was no fool, but the thing I kept foremost in my mind was, even in the smallest dealings, to play straight. I think you know that in later years I succeeded pretty well. Of course, a fellow doesn't forget, not entirely forget, not even after forty years. Do you think, Colonel, do you think a thing like that can ever be entirely lived down—redeemed, as it were ? "

The Colonel hesitated. " Yes, I do. I believe everything is redeemable. Your wife knows ? "

Griggs nodded. " I told her before we became engaged." His eyes glowed. " I believe—I believe she has almost forgotten. It is so very long ago."

THE COLONEL nodded, and then in a low voice he whispered :—

" And so you are Alec Stratford ! "

The expression of utter amazement had hardly had time to fill the eyes of " Straight Griggs " before he felt his forearm gripped in a friendly pressure. The Colonel was saying :—

" I'm sorry. Forgive me, John. I did not mean to be so theatrical. The temptation was too great. Understand at once that not a word you have told me will ever pass my lips. Only it is rather strange. Do you know that at the time of your escape I had just returned from the East and had accepted an appointment as deputy governor of Deadmoor prison ? I had not been there a month when one of the convicts—Alec Stratford—escaped. I got into trouble about it. In fact, they were so rude to me that I resigned. I did not mind much. I did not like the job.

" I remember the escape quite well. Our cook, an Irish girl, saw you on top of the wall from one of our upper windows. She did not tell us for two days, and when I taxed her with this neglect afterwards she burst into tears. She said her first instinct was to call out, but when she saw how young and brave and sad you looked, instead of doing this she went down on her knees and prayed to the Holy Mother to spare you. You may care to cherish this vision of Kathleen. She has since died."

Griggs leant forward, deep in thought. There came the sound of a piano from the drawing-room. Barbara was playing a Schubert impromptu. A large white moth fluttered across the table between the two men. From below there arose the heavy perfume of freesia. The Colonel was continuing in his gentle voice :—

" There is one point I may allay any fears you have about. You mentioned about being ' sent back to Deadmoor.' This shows that on your ride the other day you did not get very near the prison. If you had you would have observed one striking fact about it. It is dismantled."

" Dismantled ! "

" Yes. Some four or five years ago, owing to the general decrease in crime, the Home Office decided to close four prisons. Deadmoor was one of them."

" But what are they going to do with it ? "

The Colonel smiled. " Oh, what does a Government do in a case like that ? Nothing at all for years and years. And then—oh, I don't know, something happens. The place gets pulled down and disappears. You could probably buy it yourself for an old song ! "

Griggs looked up quickly. He waved his long forefinger in front of the Colonel's face.

" There's an idea in that, Colonel," he said.

SHOULD you at some time be motoring through Sussex and you pass through the valley of Tellinghurst, just beyond Glendisham where the road turns northward you will come to a plateau. On this plateau is a large stretch of intensively-cultivated land, dominated by a low white building of elegant design in the Colonial style. Around the grounds are numerous glass-houses, potting sheds, and so on. At the entrance to the drive a white board with dark green lettering announces the fact that this is " The Anne Griggs Agricultural College for Women."

For a month or so every summer you might observe at odd times a sprightly old couple, walking amidst the flowers, talking to the superintendent or the students, helping, planning, scheming. No one seems to remember that in years gone by hardened convicts traipsed the dead monotony of the exercise yard where now on that same spot fresh-complexioned girls move smilingly amidst the flowers, or stoop in loving solicitude above the soil. Perhaps sometimes the old man remembers it, but he gives no sign. The leaves fall, and the soil takes them to its bosom, against the coming of a new and distant birth. The cycle revolves, and in time everything is forgotten——

But the soil goes on, producing, producing ; indifferent to the frailties of man, recognizing neither good nor evil, but eternally concentrated on the perpetuation of life. And the new birth comes, and the young buds thrust themselves forward, eager for whatever life may hold, regardless of the tribulations of the past.

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Britain's Circus King

AN INTERVIEW WITH Captain Bertram Mills

ALLOW me to introduce to you, ladies and gentlemen, the World's Greatest Showman, King of Circus Proprietors, and, for five weeks in the year, easily the most Popular Man in the British Isles, so far as vast numbers of children are concerned, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales alone excepted. His name, ladies and gentlemen, is Bertram W. Mills, the organizing genius behind the great Christmas circus at Olympia, London.

Then one remembers with a jolt that while to Mr. Mills undoubtedly belong these picturesque, agreeable, and even enviable distinctions, he himself will have none of them. Barnum and his extravagances, rhetorical and otherwise, insists Mr. Mills, belong to the past. This fact he was at pains to impress on THE STRAND MAGAZINE interviewer who talked with him a few days ago in his extremely efficiently-run office hard by the big building which he so triumphantly packs with thrills and laughter every Christmas.

Captain Bertram W. Mills.

It is with efficiency, indeed, that Mr. Mills has replaced the flamboyances and deceptions of the older circus men of thirty years or so ago, or even rather less. He himself is the centre-pin of the very efficient organization which every year makes the Olympia Circus and Fun Fair the outstanding event of its kind in the world. He is efficient in appearance—stocky, dapper, well-groomed — and efficient in conversation—no irresolute phrasing, no sentences left in mid-air, no loose ends at all. Quite evidently Mr. Mills has organized himself as well as his giant circus. Which, you may think, sounds a trifle Robot-ish. That pert suggestion, however, is knocked on the head by the answer that Mr. Mills has what no Robot ever will have—a sense of humour. He can laugh at his clowns with the best of you, and gets every bit as much fun out of his show as any visitor to it.

And what a show, when you come to think of it! The probabilities are that you never *have* come to think of it. You sit in your seat overlooking the limelit sawdust

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ring, getting the last kick out of the thrills that are being presented to your wondering eyes, and you have absolutely no idea of the real ingredients of the uproarious spectacle you are witnessing—the amazing energy behind it all, the thousands of miles of travelling, the sublime patience—think of the training of those animals—the hotch-potch of nationalities and languages, the Babel, as it were, of contracts—Mr. Mills will draw his artists this Christmas from no fewer than twenty different countries—the unending rehearsals, the fears, the hopes, the time, the money.

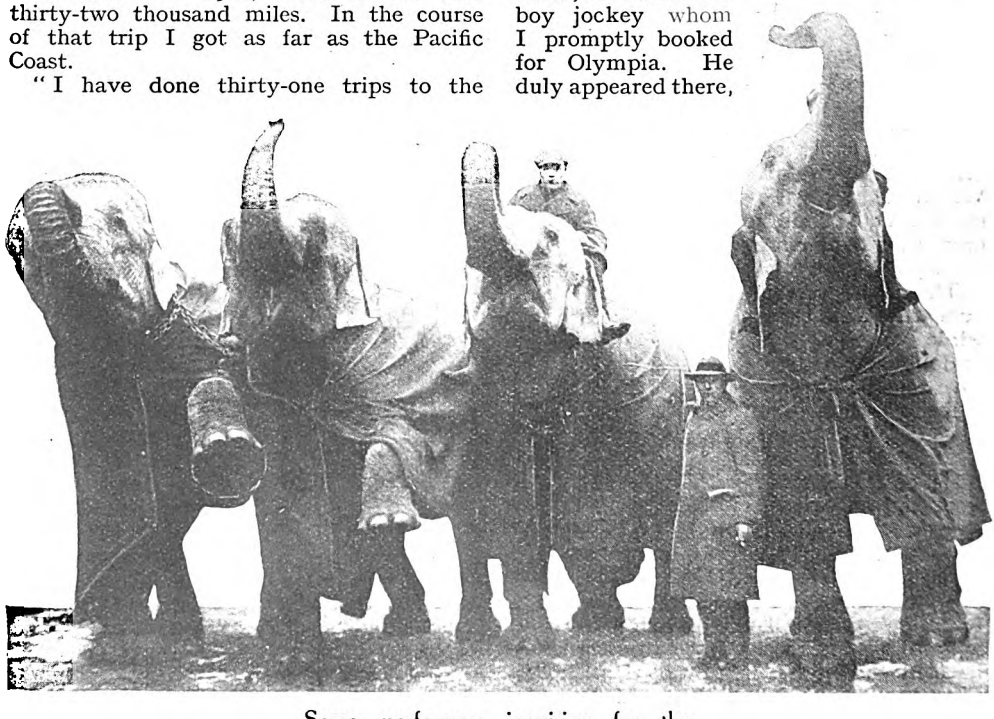
Touching on this last vital subject, Mr. Mills mentioned that the actual running expenses of his circus amount to fifteen thousand pounds *a week*. As to time, he must be even more prodigal.

"The fact is that organizing the circus, quite apart from presenting it, is a whole-time job," he said. "Within one week of bringing the curtain down at Olympia in January I shall be off again to Germany, France, Austria, and Sweden, in search of new items for my 1929–30 programme. In the last ten months I and my two sons, Cyril and Bernard, who are now with me in this business, have covered just on twenty-five thousand miles in pursuit of new material. My record year in this connection was 1926, when I did over thirty-two thousand miles. In the course of that trip I got as far as the Pacific Coast.

"I have done thirty-one trips to the United States; one of them to Kansas City to engage a single turn. Most of my patrons at Olympia do not realize, of course, that we have to be out and away again immediately after my circus closes in order to see the big Continental circuses before they break up and scatter the world over. This means at least six weeks of intensive travel by road, train, steamer, and aeroplane, after which I go farther afield, usually reaching the United States round about Easter. I see an average of a hundred circuses and kindred shows a year.

"Don't run away with the idea, though, that all this bustling about does not bring its disappointments—because it does! My sons and I have more than once done a round of the Continental shows specifically to find turns for Olympia, and have come home with nothing at all likely to give my patrons new thrills or new sensations or new laughs. Once I came back from one of these abortive and expensive trips to discover an excellent new turn in a gipsy encampment—at Willesden!

"A friend insisted on my going to the encampment to see a ragged little bareback jockey aged thirteen. I was not in the least hopeful, I can now confess, but as I have always made it a rule never to neglect a chance, I went. Result: I discovered Steve, a wonderful boy jockey whom I promptly booked for Olympia. He duly appeared there,



Some performers inquiring for the stage door upon arrival at Olympia.

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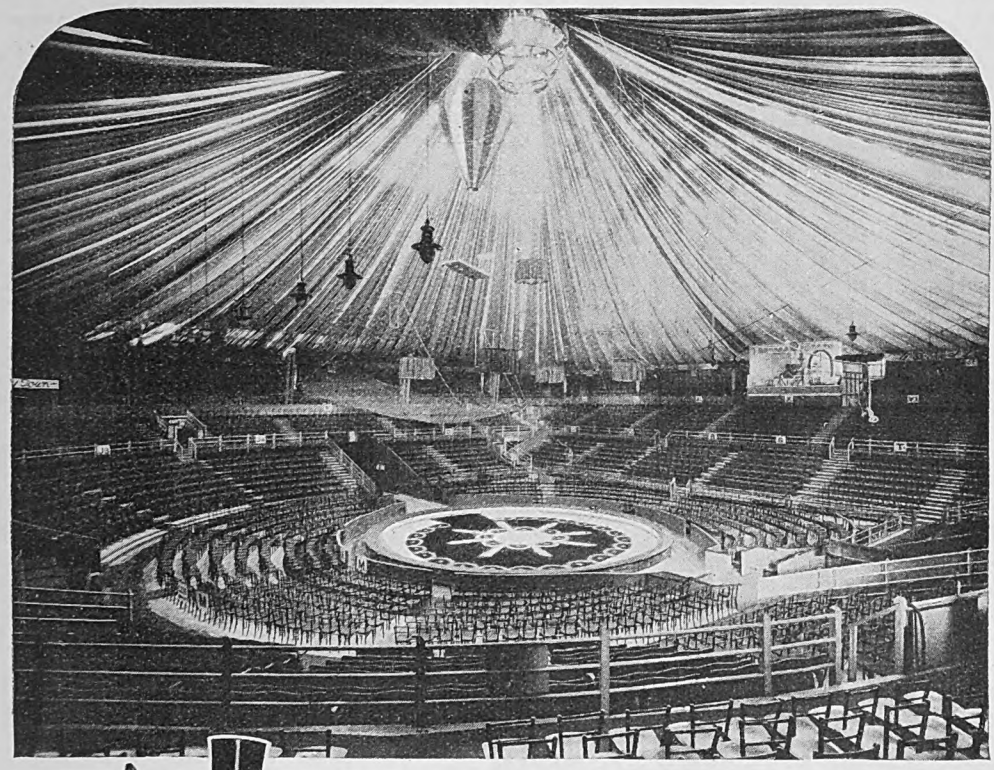
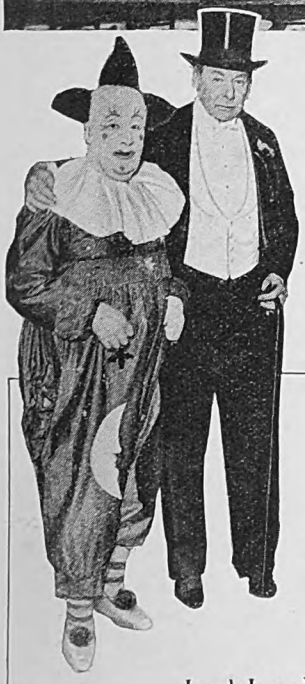


The great hall of Olympia as it is arranged in preparation for the Circus.



Lord Lonsdale with Whimsical Walker, the world-famous clown.

and afterwards secured a contract at something like the salary of a Cabinet Minister!

"Friendly tips, like the one I have just mentioned, can be extremely useful. I have my agents here, there, and everywhere, yet it often happens that I hear of a good thing from the most unexpected sources. It was an American woman friend of my wife who wrote to us from France to say that she had heard that the Austrian State greys, consisting of a beautiful team of horses formerly used exclusively for the Hapsburg State functions, were being trained for the ring under official auspices. Such a venture seemed unlikely; however, I went to Vienna on 'spec.' and found that the rumour was founded on fact.

"So 'Don't forget Olympia!' is my invariable slogan when I hear of friends going off abroad."

Disappointments have been referred to; something must be said also about the many difficulties confronting circus organizers, and this bright particular star among them, if a true picture of the business is to be given. Consider, then, as an example,

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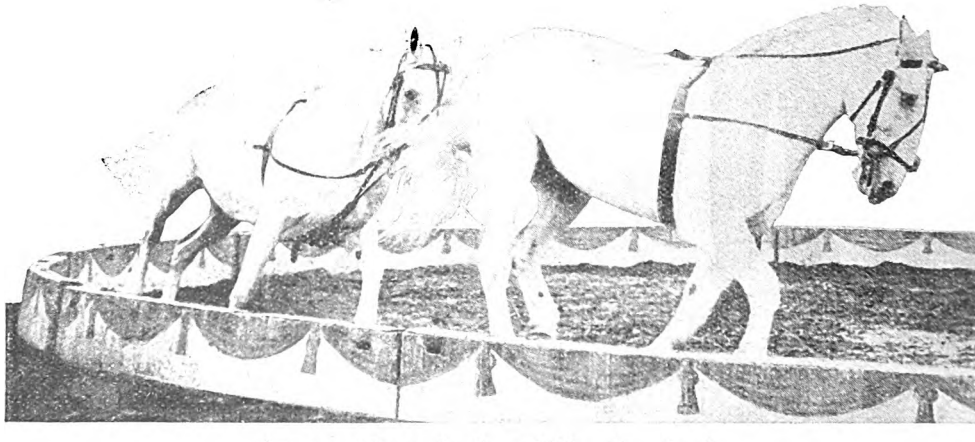
the bringing out of Russia of the horses trained by the head of the Truzzi family, an aristocrat who got into trouble with the Soviet. His own horses were confiscated and he was packed off to Siberia, literally, one supposes, to cool his heels, after having eluded the revolutionary authorities for some time. While in Siberia the exile persuaded the camp commandant to let him train some horses to do tricks for the amusement of his fellow-prisoners. His success was such that he again came to the notice of the Moscow powers that be, this time favourably, and was allowed to return to Petrograd on condition that he trained animals for the Russian State Circus in that city.

So in time, four years or so ago, Mr. Mills heard about M. Truzzi and his wonderful horses. There were negotiations with the Soviet Government, which eventually agreed to let M. Truzzi leave the country—but minus his horses. It took Mr. Mills two more years of tantalizing negotiation to secure the release of the horses, the arrangements ultimately being made through diplomatic channels in Geneva. Then, at long last, when the horses were got aboard a steamer *en route* for London the ice came down and held the ship fast in harbour. More delay; more negotiations; then an ice-breaker was requisitioned to get the ship out. Mr. Mills had reckoned the cost of transporting each horse to Olympia to be approximately fifteen pounds. By the time the team was safely in London the travelling expenses alone amounted to about one hundred pounds per horse!

That, mark you, is a solitary instance among many that make life for Mr. Bertram Mills an unusually complex and exciting affair. "Would you be a circus proprietor if you had your time all over again?" he was asked as a natural sequence to his description of obstacles faced and surmounted.

In affirming almost vehemently that he would certainly do so, Mr. Mills revealed that in the beginning he met with much discouragement and even ridicule of his efforts. He rented Olympia for the first time just after the War, intending to bring over the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's—America's biggest circus. Most of the arrangements were fixed; then it was found that certain shipping problems definitely could not be overcome. With what latter-day disciples of Dr. Samuel Smiles would call "characteristic determination," Mr. Mills decided to open a circus on his own account the following Christmas—an exceedingly bold resolve to make when you are faced with the task of filling a building holding six thousand people in the circus and thousands in the fun fair.

It was then that the tittering began. Old hands at the game declared that the idea of an international circus lasting only four or five weeks in a year was—well, silly. In the great Continental cities the circus is an organization in which the clowns are permanently employed, while the other turns come and go from week to week. In



An equestrienne in the middle of a backward somersault from one horse to another.

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the best acrobats come from Germany, the best horse acts from Italy, and the best trapeze artists—without which no circus would be complete—from Sweden and Denmark.

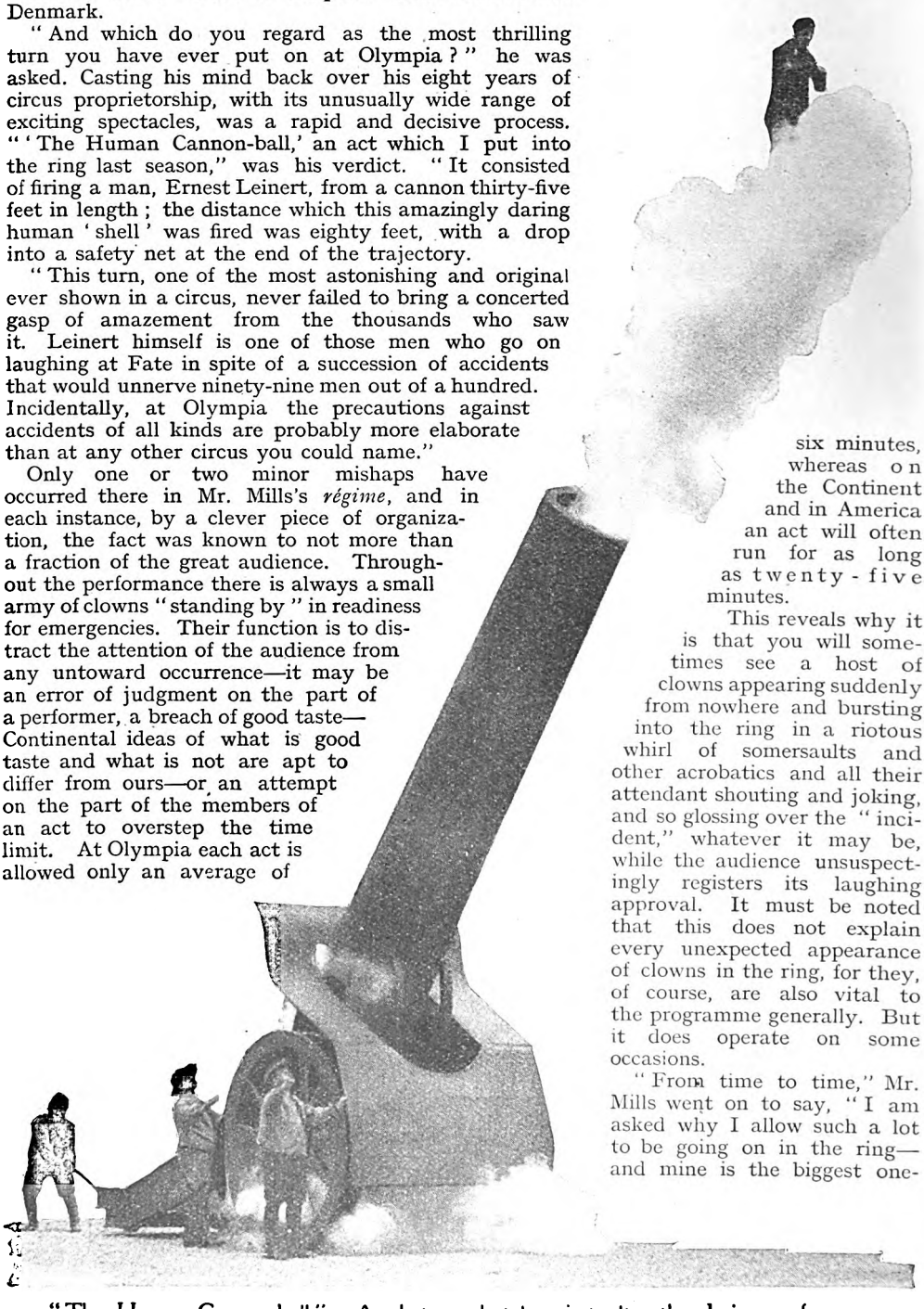
"And which do you regard as the most thrilling turn you have ever put on at Olympia?" he was asked. Casting his mind back over his eight years of circus proprietorship, with its unusually wide range of exciting spectacles, was a rapid and decisive process. "'The Human Cannon-ball,' an act which I put into the ring last season," was his verdict. "It consisted of firing a man, Ernest Leinert, from a cannon thirty-five feet in length; the distance which this amazingly daring human 'shell' was fired was eighty feet, with a drop into a safety net at the end of the trajectory.

"This turn, one of the most astonishing and original ever shown in a circus, never failed to bring a concerted gasp of amazement from the thousands who saw it. Leinert himself is one of those men who go on laughing at Fate in spite of a succession of accidents that would unnerve ninety-nine men out of a hundred. Incidentally, at Olympia the precautions against accidents of all kinds are probably more elaborate than at any other circus you could name."

Only one or two minor mishaps have occurred there in Mr. Mills's *régime*, and in each instance, by a clever piece of organization, the fact was known to not more than a fraction of the great audience. Throughout the performance there is always a small army of clowns "standing by" in readiness for emergencies. Their function is to distract the attention of the audience from any untoward occurrence—it may be an error of judgment on the part of a performer, a breach of good taste—Continental ideas of what is good taste and what is not are apt to differ from ours—or an attempt on the part of the members of an act to overstep the time limit. At Olympia each act is allowed only an average of six minutes, whereas on the Continent and in America an act will often run for as long as twenty-five minutes.

This reveals why it is that you will sometimes see a host of clowns appearing suddenly from nowhere and bursting into the ring in a riotous whirl of somersaults and other acrobatics and all their attendant shouting and joking, and so glossing over the "incident," whatever it may be, while the audience unsuspectingly registers its laughing approval. It must be noted that this does not explain every unexpected appearance of clowns in the ring, for they, of course, are also vital to the programme generally. But it does operate on some occasions.

"From time to time," Mr. Mills went on to say, "I am asked why I allow such a lot to be going on in the ring—and mine is the biggest one-



"The Human Cannon-ball." A photograph taken just after the daring performer was hurled from the cannon's mouth.

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These horses were trained to do tricks for the amusement of his fellow-prisoners by M. Truzzi, a Russian aristocrat banished to Siberia by the Soviet.

ring circus in existence—at one and the same time. The answer is that a single turn would be absolutely lost to people sitting in the seats farthest away from the ring.

"Among the most critical people in the Olympia audience of six thousand are those seated away up at the back. Olympia is 250ft. wide. For this reason I often find it necessary to amalgamate two or even more acts—a question which, if I may say so, often taxes the diplomacy of myself and my staff to the limit.

"On one occasion I was called on to settle a breach of promise affair between a man and a woman artiste whose respective turns I had bracketed in this way. The man wanted his ring back; the lady saw no excuse for giving it to him. The only way I could see out of the difficulty was to buy the lady a new ring, identical with the one given her by the man, and present it to her as a souvenir of the occasion on the understanding that she gave the other ring back to the man. The problem was in fact settled in this fashion!"

Every act seen at Olympia represents an average of thirty rejected by Mr. Mills for various reasons. Few circus-goers realize that the sawdust ring has as great an attraction for many embryo performers as the theatre or the films; there are plenty of circus-struck folk about who, while they have as much chance of "starring" as you or I, continue season after season to press their claims to fame on Mr. Mills and his fellow-showmen.

One man, a giant in stature, claimed to possess the thickest skull ever known to medical science. In proof of his contention he declared that he was willing to appear in the ring and allow any member of the audience to hit him on the head with a sledge-hammer. Probably his greatest obstacle to success would be the difficulty of finding anyone sufficiently foolhardy to take the responsibility!

Barnum, of course, made freaks of human nature a conspicuously successful feature of his show. One turn offered to Mr. Mills consisted of a lady who purported to have been endowed from birth with the skin of an elephant. His representative went to Hamburg to inspect this curious phenomenon, which was drawing large crowds at a side-show in that city. The turn did not appear at Olympia, for, as Mr. Mills's emissary adroitly discovered, it could have been made to serve a much more effective purpose as an advertisement for somebody's soap!

Another would-be sensationalist who has yet to be greeted by the plaudits of an audience at Olympia is a man who at regular intervals writes to Mr. Mills terming himself "The Human Collar-stud." His claim to this unenviable distinction is based apparently on the fact that he has been blessed by Nature with a protuberance on the back of his neck "precisely the shape of a collar-stud"!

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THE HEAD *of the* POSTMASTER-GENERAL

By

H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Illustrated by
H. M. BROCK, R.I.

I.

NOW this is the rummiest story you ever heard (said old Captain Barttels), because it's the truest. I've no holding with those chaps writing, like this chap I've been reading in *The Pacific Magazine*, out of their own heads. Fiction? Nothing but twisted lies, and the more kinks you put in the cleverer you are, and that's all there is to it.

But the Browns weren't fiction, nor what happened to them. Twins they were, born in New Bedford, and you couldn't tell one from the other on the outside.

But if you've taken notice, the outside of a man isn't the same as the inside.

Take Cleary. That chap was shaped for a parson, and he'd have sailed his way right into kingdom come to be shot out as a dud only the Penitentionary caught him first for share pushing and defrauding widows and orphans, which he won't be doing again for fifteen years.

It was the same with William Brown. He was the mother's darling and as innocent-looking as pie. Now those two kids was as like as two raspberries, but William was the darling. How did the woman know one from the other, there was no outside difference? I'll tell you. William was streaky on the inside, that's how she knew him, by instinct, and that's why she loved him more than James. They always do love the streaky ones or the hump-backs, and it 'pears to me if you want to make a woman happy for life you've only got to give her a hydrocephalous hobgoblin for a son-an'-'eir, or barring that a congenital idiot.

James was different. He was white on the inside, and as a consequence neglected. William would snap the pap-boat from James, if no one was looking, and empty it on the floor if he was too full himself, and rob the kicking donkey money-box when he was big enough to reach the shelf, and spend the savings on candy, leaving the blame on James.

It was the same when they went to school, where William wasn't long finding out what a blessed dispensation it is to be born twins, with a brother to shovel your misdeeds on to.

It was William who robbed the orchard and James who got the flogging, and somehow or another James never could put matters right, for he was truthful, y' see, but the other was a liar; and at last James got sick of it and ran away to sea. He couldn't stand it any longer and he just quit, and he told me that though he'd got on to a hard ship it was better than William; he said he felt like the chap who had the hump taken off his back, and that being so he naturally expanded, and legging it off the ship at El Passo, which is on the Spanish-American coast, he gets a job on the wharf, and from the wharf he gets a job in an office, and he hadn't been there long in the office when he gets a rise in his salary. It was like a monkey climbing a tree the way he went up, and all the time he was plucking the dollars off and putting them in his pocket till he had enough to start a business of his own.

And the first thing he does after he gets on his own with a little business is to send his mother a draft for five hundred dollars.

That's the sort of chap he was; always put behind the door at home and given the second best of food, yet the first thing he

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does is to send home five hundred dollars which he couldn't more than afford.

But he wouldn't have done that if he'd known that William would be the chap to cash the draft—which he was.

William, under home influences, hadn't prospered much in New Bedford, for New Bedford isn't a cucumber frame for the forcin' of mothers' darlings. In Hiram Scudder's shipping office, where he was put to learn the business and make himself useful, he didn't get on with Hiram and he didn't get on with the clerks, and they hoofed him after he had been there a year; and back he came to his mother, who was a widow by this, and down he sat to watch her work for him, which she did.

HE didn't smoke. It was about the only thing he didn't do that he didn't ought to have done, but he loafed just as good and spent the money. You can spend a lot of money on nothing if you know how, and William was a specialist. However, he reckoned without the rheumatism.

It didn't come to him; it come to his mother, and drove her from the wash-tub into her bed and kept her there, and it looked as if this chap would have to put his hand to his mouth to feed himself, to say nothing of the old woman, but the Williams have all the luck, and no sooner had she got between the sheets than along comes the five hundred dollars from James.

William cashed it and paid the rent; yes, he did that, and he supported his mother for four years with James's money, which come regular every quarter, though truth to be told she wanted little, seein' she was a rheumatic patient and the doctor couldn't do her any good, and so things went on till the time come when the poor old lady died and William found himself without the means of support. He wrote to James, telling him how ill his mother was, and along come another five hundred and she in her coffin, but William didn't bother about that; it seemed to William as if a goose had dropped a golden egg into his hand, and it seemed to him a little later that he only could go on living by keeping his mother alive.

So he did. It was about the only thing he ever done for her, but he did it, and the contributions come in so regular that he began to think if it wouldn't be well to get married, and cheaper than livin' in a boarding-house.

So he cast his eyes round, and he was just on the point of putting his hooks into as pretty a girl as you'd meet on the sea front, when the contributions stopped sudden like a watch that's been dropped out of a four-storey window.

They'd always come on a fixed date, and William could have told the day of the month just by coming down in the morning and seeing the letter from El Passo with President Perira's head on the stamp.

Well, the date come as I was sayin', and the President failed to keep it.

No letter.

William went to the post-office to see if anything had happened to the U.S. mails, but it hadn't.

The boats and trains were moving as usual, and the papers said nothing about any revolution in South America.

He waited a day, but nothing come, and then he went off to Minnie Hatton, the girl he'd been just on the point of putting his hooks into, and she, poor thing, dusted a chair for him, and when she asked him what he wanted, he said he wanted to marry her.

That's what he said, and he with his means of living gone from under him. But William never said anything without a reason to it, and when he asked Minnie Hatton to marry him he had his reasons; and when she consented after consulting with her mother, he bought her a ring worth five hundred dollars, twenty dollars down and the rest in instalments; and when the ring had settled on her finger, wedding her so to speak to confidence, William borrowed a thousand dollars from her mother.

"I've got the chance of my life," said he, "in Argentina. It'll never come again, and I only want a thousand dollars to make up the purchase money. It's a sugar proposition, and if you'll lend me the thousand you shall have it back on my return, for I have only to speak to old Dobson of the Sixth National Bank to draw what I want from him, but he's away in the Catskills shootin' bears, and that's how I'm landed," he says. And she bein' an honest woman without guile sells out stock and lends him the dollars. He wanted those dollars, and I'll tell you why. New Bedford was done with him. He'd tapped every money source above or under ground; second, a letter had come from James regretting the death of his mother.

Someone must have put James wise to the fact of the old woman's death. However that may be, he knew, and it was pretty sure he didn't know the date, for there were no reproaches at the news having been kept back a year, not a word to hint that James knew that William had been lapping up the remittances. That was all right so far as it went, but the bother was the remittances had stopped.

This and the fact that New Bedford had frozen to him was what made William anxious to get out and earn some money,

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and as the only way of earning money he knew was sponging on James, he had determined to go to El Passo to do the sponging; but as you can't get to El Passo from New Bedford without money and a good deal of it, he fixed up the engagement with Minnie Hatton so's he could borrow a thousand dollars from her mother, which she wouldn't have lent only he'd made Minnie a present of a genu*ine* diamond ring which he'd got on the instalment system, paying twenty dollars a month and never intendin' to pay more.

He was out twenty dollars, that was all. It was all as intricate as the insides of a watch. But he tried to simplify it before he sailed, borrowing the ring from Minnie to have the stones re-set, and pawning it with Gilligans, that place in Fourth Street down by the Hard.

No, the ship didn't sink with him. Why, bless you, a chap like that is a mascot, same as a Bishop is a sure sinker. They made a quick passage, and the chap went first-class and enjoyed himself, for he won at cards and he won the pool twice on the ship's run, and he spooned a girl and all but got engaged to her before they touched the wharf.

II.

EVER been to El Passo? Well, it's changing. The old mud fort is gone and the smells have been took in charge and there's four big hotels and a dozen movie palaces. All the same, the day William Brown landed the place wasn't bad to look at—and over the harbour smells, when the wind got a kick on, come the smell of lemon groves and coffee in flower and the tunes of guitars and so on, and William said to himself that barring accidents he reckoned El Passo would do *him* all right. He got his dunnage out of the ship on to the wharf and hired a fly and told the driver to take him to his brother's address, and the driver whipped up the old bag of bones in the shafts, and off they started, going right through the town, along a country road, and in at a gate through a garden to a bungalow.

It was all open veranda, and a brown servant came running out, grinning all over, to fetch in the luggage, and William followed along, having paid off his driver and dropped into a seat on the veranda to wait for James to appear, or someone else. No one appeared but the grinning jackanapes, who had come back now with a tray with rum and lemons and crushed ice and sugar and soda-water, which he put on a table by William, who helped himself and leaned back in his chair to enjoy himself till James turned up. He hadn't spoken to the servant, for he'd sent a

letter by the mail that left New Bedford the day before he started telling James of his coming, and he naturally took the servant's grins and grimaces and attentions for himself. Well, after a while and two rum sangarees, he got up from his chair and, coming into the house, began to look round. On one side of the hall opened a big bare room that was used as a dining-room, and on the left a big bare room that looked like an office. Both were furnished with cane rockers and spittoons and smelt about pretty equal of dead cigars.

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William come into the office, and there on the table he saw a lot of letters laid out, and, being curious-minded, he looked at them.

They were letters that had come by post and not been opened, and there amongst them, stamped and all, was his own letter, which had come but never been opened.

"Why, what's this?" says he to himself. "Is James ill or away?"

He sat down and began to think, and he hadn't been thinking long when he comes

A brown servant came running out, grinning all over, to fetch in the luggage.

to the conclusion that James must be away, and that the servant must have mistaken him for James returned. Then he got up with this thought in his head and he began to examine the room. There was a big safe with a brass handle, and beside the main table in the centre a bureau in a corner.

Then leaving the room he come out and began to prospect, going from one room to the other till he found James's bedroom.

He knew it for James's, because there was a tin box with the initials "J. B." on it and some clothes hanging up, just James's size, and shoes and boots and so on.

Yes, there could be no doubting the fact that James was away and that William had been mistaken for him, for here was his luggage. If the brown servant had wondered why his master come back with luggage different from what he had taken away, he had said nothing—or only that word of Spanish which evidently meant "Welcome."

William felt put out. To tell the truth, he had come here with doubts in his mind as to James's reception of him and the dread that James might offer him, instead of hospitality, a job of work. He wanted to get the business over and done with. He come back to the office, and here as he turned over the letters on the table it come to him that he might rummage about as much as he liked, seeing that if a servant come in he would be taken for the master of the house.

He noticed that a revolving calendar on the table had not been turned for three days, so it was probable that James had been three days away. Then he set to on the drawers of the bureau, pulling them out and examining their contents, for he was as inquisitive as a magpie.

But there wasn't any money or valuables, only letters and invoices and such things, but there was one letter with the New Bedford post-mark, which he opened and read.

It was from Byers, a New Bedford man in the shipping trade, and it was quite recent, and it ran:—

> *"In answer to yours, Mrs. Brown has been dead over a year; your brother William is still living in the house, but it's a miracle to us all what he lives on, for he does no work."*

Gosh! that was a bomb-shell! James knew all!

The sponger sat with his head in his hands, wishing he was back in New Bedford. He had enough money, seeing what he'd won on board ship, not to speak of the remains of the thousand dollars of Minnie's mother, but he didn't want to go back. He shoved the papers and things into the drawer, and as he was so doin' he must have touched a spring or something, for a little flap clicked open and out fell a bunch of keys.

"Keys," says he. Then he picked them up and looked at them, and the thought that they must be valuable, being hid so secret, made him look at them again.

Then he looked at the safe.

He tried them, and the last one he tried did the job and the safe come open.

And there wasn't much in it. A bag with twenty sovereigns, a round box like a

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female's band-box, only not so big, and a bundle of bonds that weren't worth more'n their price as wall-paper, that's all he found.

But, mark you, he was on the run, so to speak, knowing he'd be kicked out when James returned, so he put the sovereigns in his pocket.

THEN he looked at the box. It was carefully parcelled up in paper. It had come by post, and on it in writing was the address :—

"Señor James Brown,
Casa Brown,
El Passo.
(To be kept till called for.)"

William couldn't resist it. There might be something valuable in it and there mightn't, but it wasn't that that made him want to open it. It was just the want to open it.

He took out his penknife and carefully slit the paper, and when he got the paper off the top he saw that the box was a cigar drum; at least, "Panatellas" was marked on it, but it didn't feel somehow like a box of Panatellas. It was too heavy.

He worked the top off the drum, and there was something round and hairy inside he couldn't make out. Then he turned the thing upside down on the table and shook it, and out came a man's head.

It had been dried, but not too much, and it was the head of a Spaniard. You could tell that right off by the look of the face, let alone the chin tuft; and William let a whoop out of him and nearly doubled up, but pulled himself together, and not a bit too soon, for voices were coming from the veranda, and he recognized the voice of James.

He shot the head into the waste-paper basket and the Panatella box under the table, and was turning to shut the safe, but he was too late. James was at the door, just coming in, followed by the brown servant, who was looking several times scared to see his master returning twice, so to speak.

"Hello!" said James.

"Hello!" said William.

James looked at the open safe.

He was evidently full up with William and his misdeeds, but the sight of the open safe struck him dumb for half a moment.

Then, when he'd got a purchase on himself :—

"You scoundrel!" says he.

"Servant's listening," says William.

James ordered the servant out, then he began :—

"Not content," says he, "with defrauding me for more than a year by skoffing the contributions I sent for the support of my pore mother," he says, "you come to my house," says he, "and break open my safe," he says, "for which the law gives ten years' imprisonment in the quicksilver mines—where you'll go or my name isn't Jimmy Brown," he says.

"Breaking open your safe! You mean breaking open your Mouseoleum," says William.

"My what?"

"Place where you keep heads."

"What heads?"

"This head," and he picked up the basket and rolled the head on to the table.

"Why, it's the head of the Postmaster-General!" cries James. "Don Alonzo Alphonso Alvarez, murdered two months ago, and a reward of ten thousand dollars out for whoever will give information leading to the arrest of the assassins."

"And here's what it came in," said William, taking the box from under the table.

"I've been betrayed," cries the other. "That box was sent to me from a customer at Lima to be kept till called for. It's all a plot to hide the murderer and drag me in."

"So you say," says William.

"What you mean?" says James.

"Nothing," said William. "Ten thousand dollars reward, did you say?"

"That's the sum," says the other.

"Well, it's worth getting," says William

"How do you mean?" asks James.

"How do I mean? Why, I've only to go to the police and give information—see? And then where'd you be?"

"Get out of my house," says James.

"I'm getting," says William. "But you've insulted me and called me as good as a house-breaker and stained my character, and it's worth five thousand dollars to me, which, if you'll pay two thousand five hundred down, and the rest in instalments, I'll call the matter closed. . . .

"I'm gettin'," he says, as James kicked him down the veranda steps, "but the door's still open for negotiations till I reach the fence. Beyond that," says he, "you're done."

Beyond the fence he was as good as his word and hoofed it for El Passo and the police, James returning to his office to put things in order.

III.

JAMES didn't bother about the threat of the other. First, he didn't believe he was such a low-down hound as to give information against his own brother; second, he had lots of time and was going to bury the head.

He was fond of gardening, and kept his spades and rakes, and so on, in a tool-house

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He was turning to shut the safe, but he was too late. James was at the door.

close to a big banyan tree by the side of the bungalow, and out he goes now and gets a spade, and in a nice secluded spot by a big datura bush he digs a hole four foot deep. He goes back and fits the head into the box and ties the lid down and carries it out and buries it. Then he smooths the ground over it.

There was a bell-bird singing from a tree near by, and the datura blossoms made as pretty a picture as you'd wish to see. You never would have thought there was anything buried just there, and James, leaning on his spade, felt sure in his mind that, come what might, the business could never be discovered.

Then it seemed to him as he leaned on his spade that it was providential William coming and burgling the safe, for if some other burglar had come instead, the fat would have been twice as much in the fire.

And he sighs and goes back to the house and has a drink and a smoke, and grins to himself, thinking what a fool William will look if he gives word to the police and the police come and find nothing. Then he

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burns the coverings of the box with the covering letter, so that all traces of the thing might be gone.

Then he has dinner.

IV.

AFTER dinner he was seated on the veranda smoking and watching the fireflies when the gate latch clicked, and in came the police, followed by William, who was being held by a sergeant.

They accused him right off, and he laughed and got up and asked them to come into the house and have a look round, taking them into the office and showing them the safe which William had told them the head had been taken from.

Sure enough, there was nothing in it but the bonds, and it wasn't till this minute that James noticed the little bag of sovereigns had been taken.

He cries out at this and accuses William, and the police put their hands in William's pockets, and, sure enough, the money is there!

Tables turned, as you may say, but it wasn't for long. One of the police had gone to the kitchen for drinks or something, and there the servant had given him some information. Told him he'd seen James burying something in the garden, offered to show the place, and did.

Well, you can think!

Was there ever a man so got into the grip of the Law as James?

You see, if he hadn't denied the thing the way he did, the thing wouldn't have been so bad, though, goodness knows, it was bad enough.

Off they marched him with William before an examining magistrate.

"Now," says the magistrate, "what have you to say to this?" and James slung his tale about how the parcel had been sent to him to keep by Alonzo Santiago, a coffee merchant of Lima, who was one of his clients.

The magistrate put the telephone to his ear and rang up the chief of police at Lima to get him to inquire of Santiago if this was so, and back came the answer that Santiago was dead, had died the day before.

Then it was that James found he had made a holy error in burning the covering of the box with the postmarks on it and the covering letter. Seemed to him that he had got into a trap made by the devil.

"Take him off," said the magistrate, and off they took him and put him in a cell, and a Spanish cell is spelt with an "h" instead of a "c," I can tell you, and William, left behind with the magistrate, pulled up his collar and put on his best manners. He reckoned the reward was as good as in his pocket.

"Now," says the magistrate to the police-sergeant, "what about this chap?"

"He wants the reward," said the sergeant, with a grin, "which he can't have for two reasons, seems to me; first, he's the brother of the criminal, as anyone can see from the likeness; second, he's been accused of breaking into the safe at the house of the criminal and stealing a bag of gold coins which was found on him, and, as your excellency knows, a thief is barred from receiving anything of that sort from the Government."

"Shove him with the other," says the magistrate, and lit a cigarette.

And William, who didn't understand a word they were saying, seeing they were talking in Spanish, was taken off and shut in with James.

V.

JAMES was sitting on a bench fighting the fleas when the other came in with the door banged behind him and locked.

Furious he was, but James was quite calm and contented, or looked it.

"Now," said James, "a nice thing you've done. They'll hang me for certain, and they'll hang you as well, for you're my brother, and you can't deny that, seeing it's writ in your face. And if they didn't hang you you'd get ten years in the quicksilver mines for stealing that money."

"Hang *me!*" cries William. "Why, what have I done? I've had no hand in the business. I may have come and opened your safe—I admit that; and seeing those sovereigns, I took them, I admit that, but hanging——"

"You won't be hanged."

"Well, what were you talking about?"

"They don't hang here, they garrotte. Put you in a chair with an iron collar round your neck, and squeeze the collar tight till your eyes pop out. That's what's coming to you, William Brown, as sure as it's coming to me."

"But you'll tell them?" said William.

"What?" asks James.

"That I had no hand in the murder of this chap, that I'm an innocent man. Stealing, yes, I owns to that, but murder, I'm no murderer."

"Well, you take the bun," says James. "You go out and give me away in this business and then ask me to speak for you——"

"Please remember," says William, "that you kicked me cruel. I was hot with anger, or I wouldn't have done it; and I never thought it would have landed you in a mess like this. I only thought you'd be able to give news of where that head had come

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from—I thought maybe we'd share the reward."

James laughed.

"So we will," said he.

"But, James, dear James," said William.

"Oh! stow it," answers the other. "I've had enough of you and your ways. When we were in the cradle you'd grab the pap-boat and spill it if you couldn't swallow it; you'd empty the money-box and I'd get the licking, and you the candy and crackers and tops and what all; at school it was the same. You've lived in luxury on my hard earnings, and on top of all you've landed me here. Get out!"

"I wish I could," says William, looking at the bars of the window which opened on Mercedes Square, where they could hear the fellows courting and playing mandolines, and knifing each other, and the fireworks going off, for it was a feast day. "I wish I could," and then he begins the soft sawther business, piping his eye and talking of his youth and their mother. He goes on and on till James, who was always a fool, begins to soften.

And at last, just as he often did before, he gives in.

"I'll tell them," he says, "you had no hand or part in the matter—and now shut up."

"Swear that," cries William.

"I never swear," replies James. "You know I never break my word, and that my promise is as good as my bond."

"That's true," replied William. "But, James—dear James—promise also to tell them that I didn't steal those sovereigns—you wouldn't see your brother taken off to those quicksilver mines——"

But that was too much for James.

"I swear I *will* tell them," said he, "and now shut up, for I want to get to sleep."

Then he lay down on the bench, but he couldn't sleep between the fleas and the mandolines and the noise of the crackers, and then the church bells let out tonk, tonk, tonk. You know them Spanish church bells; and then a bugle sounded, and then as sudden as a clap of thunder turned inside out came a dead silence.

"Lord, what's that?" says William. "What a town to be livin' in. Crazy when it's making a noise and crazier when it's——"

Bang!

A gun went off from the old mud fort, and bang! another went off from the Presidio, and crash! musketry broke out with the blowing of more bugles. And then come shrieks of women and children, and the sound of their runnin' before the tramp of troops, and the square filled up like a bowl under a spout with the roar of a mob running and fighting and the rattle of old machine-guns bought at bargain prices out of the Great War.

AND so it went on.

"It's only a revolution," said James, lighting a cigarette.

"Is that so?" says William, not to be outdone. "Sounds to me more like a meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association."

"Catholic town," says James.

"Forgot," says William. "Hark!"

The noise had stopped dead off.

"Fly in the carburettor," says William.

Then come the sound of a bugle crowing like a drunken rooster, and the cell door breaks open, and chaps with torches come in and a yellow man with a long moustache in a general's uniform seized James and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Tell him to kiss me too," says William, but James wasn't listening. He was jabbering with the yellow man. Then he turns to his brother.

"Revolution," says he. "They've assassinated Perira and Carquinez is President, and I'm to be made Minister of Public Works because they believe I assassinated Alvarez. Get me? The chap whose head you found and who made himself disliked by raising the telephone charges——"

"James," cried William, "tell them—I helped to do the killing. You wouldn't keep me out of a grand thing like this when a whisper from you would do the trick?"

"I'll do no such thing," says James. "I never go back on my word, and, moreover," says he, "you'll have to take your gruel over the safe business," which he had.

But James had a soft spot. He was all soft once till William hardened him pretty much all over. However, he had a soft spot, and he intervened as Minister of Public Works and got the chap took from the quicksilver mines and put to work on the breakwater, and maybe he'd have taken him off the breakwater and got him to mind a dust-cart or something only that he got to hear of the Minnie Hatton business. It was that that hardened the soft spot for good and all and grew hair on it.

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MY MERMAID *and the* GIANTS

Being the yarn that J. B. Barley handed to us after the dinner at the Birds' Club, St. James's, S.W., which we gave to celebrate his return from foreign parts, and now set down by

C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

Illustrated by
TOM PEDDIE

GETTING into the cave was not a job I liked. The entrance, at its best, was only three feet high, and that was only between waves. But as it was the best seal-breeding cave in the Faröes, I had to go. And never mind about my calling our twelve Austin Alice. We'll get down to that later. Also carry the name of J. J. Murgatroyd in your heads. I want to find the address of Murgatroyd, and he doesn't live at Wigan now. He's a red-headed man, so you'd think he'd be easy to trace. But I've missed him so far.

You know the double-ended Faröe Island boats, with their high stem and stern pieces, like the old Viking ships of their ancestors, and you know the kit of the Faröe fishermen—black knickers, noisy-coloured jumper, pirate's red night-cap, and bare legs and feet. Well, I'd chartered two of these comic opera outfits, number one to stay outside, and number two to squirm into the cave when the swell said "go," with a rope between the boats so that number two could be hauled back to daylight as and when required.

As I've said, I didn't like the job one little bit. But I was on Fishery Board business, and inspection of this particular cave had been put down most specifically in my orders.

If you want to find the spot on the chart, hunt up the island called Niig, which the "Sailing Directions" will tell you is inaccessible. It is all that, even to a Faröe fowler, who's got toes like a monkey, and can go up most things that are not bare boiler-plate and rock. The black outside cliffs all round Niig are a good eleven hundred feet sheer, and are whitened in patches with the sea-fowl droppings. There is a perpetual surf creaming against the foot of the rocks. The cave entrance is on the western side, in the Sound opposite Levanten village. I repeat again that only in the most favourable moods of wind and sea is there as much as three feet of clearance between the crown of the arch and the water.

Well, then, there we were, with the black Niig cliffs looming (so it appeared from a rocking boat) about a mile high above us, and the cave mouth winking in and out as the swell slapped against it, and squirting out spouts of surf when it felt so inclined. It gave me the creeps even to look that way. My fancy-dress fishermen had given up talking English, which they could do quite well at ordinary temperatures, and were getting excited in the local Chocktaw, which drifts a long way off Danish when they are really set agoing. There was a good deal of chat about *Havmand* and *Havfrue*, which literally mean merman and mermaid. But I concluded that was the local patois for seals, which is what we were after, though the proper Danish word for seal is much the same as ours. However, I smoked at my pipe and tried to look stolid, and hoped that

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it and the swell together wouldn't make me sick.

Then the commander-in-chief gave the word for the boats to "go," and in procession of two (with the rope between us) we started to back in towards those tremendous white and black cliffs. My particular lot set up some sort of chat about *Huldafolk*, which is one of the brands of fairy. But this seemed to brighten them, so I hoped it was the good *Huldafolk* who were going to see us through in spite of the mermen's teeth. I didn't care much how it was done so long as I got out my Report for the Fishery Board, and came back to daylight again with a sound skin. The man at the steering oar was a curious double of my old C.O. in the War, grown hairy. So as I never could get round his local name, I called him Colonel.

A porpoise nearly ran us down in the passage, and went out to sea with an open exhaust and all gas on. Being something of a fish merchant, I called the beast plain porpoise. I noticed that my Faröe boatmen were chatting nervously about *Havfrues* and *Huldafolk* whilst they scratched themselves, though the context was beyond me; and as the boat surged up on a swell just then, and bumped my shoulder against the rock arch above, to tell the truth, scientific observation for the Fishery Board was a bit out of my line till we had come through the low part of the passage into the full stink of the cave.

THE place inside was surprisingly big. It was not particularly high, you understand, but made up of pillars and arches, with the wide water-levels between them going away into infinite distances. It murmured with a constant lap-lap-lap of tiny wavelets against its sides. The sea in the entrance was deep and translucent, and let through quite a sufficiency of thin green light. Indeed, after the first minute or two of blindness (after coming in out of the North Sea sunshine), I was surprised to find the place so well lit. But the smell! My sacred aunt! I'll trouble you for the smell!

Of course, a Faröe fisherman has a nose that is stink-proof, and to advertise it the Colonel and the rest of them always gutted their cod immediately outside their own front doors, and left the results where they flopped. I didn't suppose it would be much good commenting on the smell to the Colonel, but, by way of being chatty, I said I thought with such a good seal-scent we ought to be soon on to game.

"*Ikke sael*, Mistor. *Finne*."

"Not seal, isn't it? And *finne* means finner whale? Sorry to call you a liar, Colonel, but no finner could squeeze in here through that eye of a needle. Well, never mind about any more local colour. Shove ahead, and let's get to the seal-beaches."

"*Finne*, what *we* call," the linguist persisted; "all-e-same *hvalfisk*, what *you* call, Mistor."

"Meaning you stick to the whale? All right, Colonel, have it your own way. But another observer does the whaling end for my Fishery Board, thank the Lord, so we'll give that a miss and get along to the seals, if *you* please."

"I tink no. We come far enough to-day. *Havmand*, he say 'no go on.' He there down where the light show in the water. You see him?"

The Colonel's grimy finger-nail pointed shakily, and I stared down into the green water, and if I hadn't known perfectly well that what I saw was a seal, I could have sworn it was a man, swimming on his back and staring up at me. Merman, I suppose you'd call him.

And then it seemed as if somebody loosed off a depth charge. The water bulged into a great mushroom, and between the top of the mushroom and the roof of the cave our double-ended boat was cracked like a nut. I—but it's no use guessing. That's about all I know.

The next thing that occurred to me was I had a splitting headache, that I was stretched out like a dead cod on a slab of rock. I dripped with cold water. Boat and Faröe fishermen had all vanished. But the green light, the caves, the sea, and the stink, especially the stink, were all present and correct. I wondered dully if the Colonel had been right after all, and that a finner whale had got into the cave and—well—done the necessary. And there I think I must have fainted again, because when next I opened my eyes and began to take notice it was dark.

However, nights are short during summer in the Faröes, when there are any nights at all, and presently the green light began to glow again, and one could call it day. On the ledge of rock beside me was a fish, where I could swear there had been no fish before. It was a grilse of about six pounds weight. Also it had a lump bitten out of its shoulder. An otter kills his fish that way, but I never heard that finner whales did, or that they had a fancy for young salmon. Otters, of course, or possibly seals. Yes, that was it, a seal. The one I had seen swimming, deep below the surface, facing upwards. But do seals deposit six-pound grilse as a sort of votive offering beside those apparently drowned? They may do, of course, but I never heard of it. But, on the other

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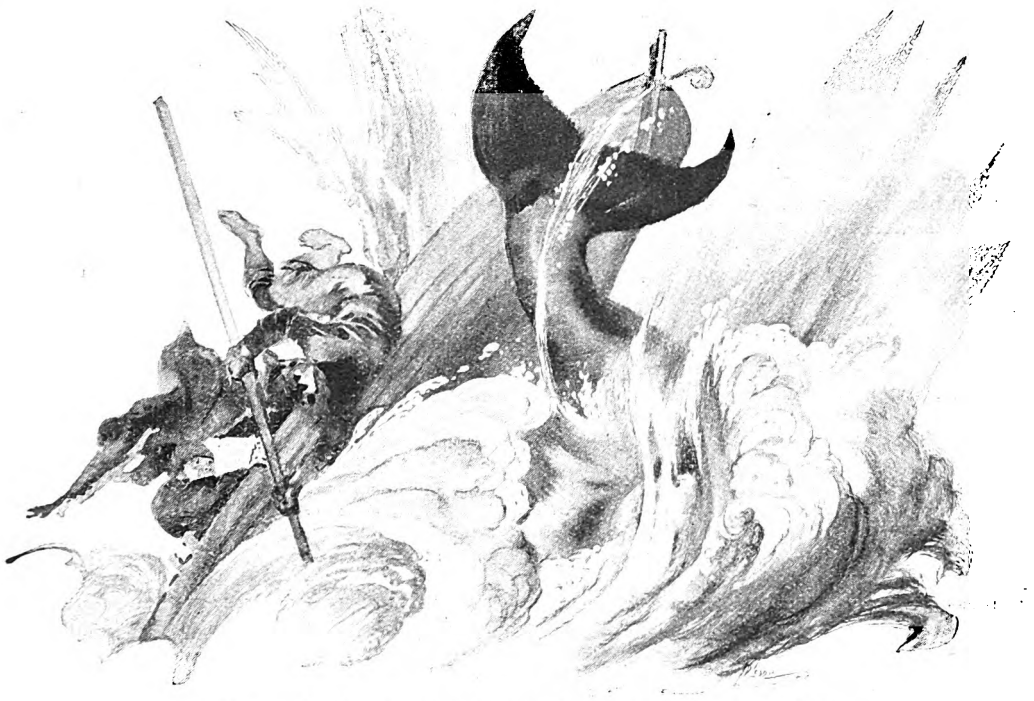

And then it seemed as if somebody loosed off a depth charge.

hand, a merman—or even a mermaid—poof!

Gingerly I got to my feet. No bones broken. But I was very thoroughly bruised, and my shoulder, which had taken the bump against the roof, ached like a row of sore teeth. Also I was cold, so cold that I quivered and shivered like a jelly in a restaurant-car. There wasn't the least chance of rescue from those hairy, flea-ridden fishermen in the boat outside. They, to an absolute certainty, would have written me off as a total loss. Also, I'd lost my pince-nez (and so was nearly blind), and my pipe was water-logged. I'd looked upon FINIS before, in the way of business, more than once during the War years, as you men know, so that aspect was not altogether new. But dying in that cold and whale-stink made the affair merely squalid.

My ledge had about the acreage of a flat-topped writing desk; the back wall overhung, so that I could not stand up; at flood the cave water lapped it; and at ebb the little waves prattled against it eight feet lower down. Cold fresh water was laid on in a pattering series of drops from a crack in the basaltic roof—but then I never was fond of undiluted H_2O as a beverage. And by way of furnishing there was the six-pound grilse with the otter-bite in its shoulder. Lax, of course, one was used to; we had lax amongst the *hors d'œuvre* at the club here to-night; and lax is merely raw salmon dried and smoked. Leaving out the drying and smoking—and the white man's squeamishness—this was all-e-same thing. And I was infernally hungry. It really wasn't so bad. But if you fellows are going to try the game, take my tip and skin before you gnaw. Salmon scales—uncooked, I mean—are the very devil if they get between your teeth, or under a plate.

By way of grace I kissed my hand to the donor of the feast, down there in the water below me. "Thank you, my dear," I said, "whoever you are. It might have been worse. Accept my compliments, and note that I have put off dying for another twenty-four hours." And so passed that day, as the story-book says.

Midnight and the top of the flood tide came about together, and when the water was nearest to my ledge, and the darkness thickest, something out of both of them—something soft, and tremendously powerful, and (I vaguely thought) warm, hit me a wallop over the very sorest part of my sore back. It flicked me off my ledge, and I soused into deep water. And then it somehow picked me up and went away with

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me, sometimes on the surface, but mostly under water, at the pace of a destroyer. Like my pipe, I also got water-logged, and what bits of sense I'd got remaining were washed out of me. You people needn't snigger. I've really been through a very strenuous time, and my Fishery Board is merely sick with me.

But presently, as it seemed, I began to take notice again, and the first thing I realized was that the bitter clammy cold had eased off. I was ashore somewhere. I'd some kind of a radiator at my back—a soft, comfortable kind of radiator, and two bands of radiator round the rest of me. They smelt of shrimps and sea water. And then it began to dawn on my muggy brain that the radiator was heaving me gently up and down, and that it was alive, and that the two bands were arms, and that the fingers at the end of one of them were patting me like one pats a kid to soothe it. Well, I'm a pretty hefty kid, as you know*, and it struck me I'd been supplied with an outsize in nurses. Moreover, the unseen one's breath smelt strongly, as I've mentioned, of things of the sea. But I didn't kick or complain. Blessed warmth was what I'd got, and there didn't seem to be a higher prize in all the list of luxuries. I didn't even want to have the light turned on. I was perfectly content to be cuddled there in the dark, and didn't care a hoot whether I was in this world or the next, where I believe no written Reports are demanded from you.

And so to sleep, with a set of weird but, on the whole, rather agreeable dreams. But I won't worry you about those. When I woke I was stiff enough, but warm and dry. Nurse had gone off watch, and it was bright daylight. I was on a bed, or perhaps, to be more accurate, in a sort of nest of what looked like crisp dried seaweed. Possibly it was seaweed. Only it was a sort that was outside my botanical range. I pocketed a sample for my Board, but lost it later. Anyway, the stuff was heaped up over me, and there I lay, with only my head sticking out, all in a pleasant glow of heat that seemed to have soothed away my bruises.

The house, as a house, wasn't up to much. It was like one of those old-fashioned coke-ovens, beehive shaped I believe they were called. It was plastered over on the inside with pink mud, and the workman had left his finger-marks. The only furnishing I could see was a mud shelf. I craned up my head to look, and saw on it a round tin box, rusted, and fringed with green weed.

I got it down. There was a rusty tin-opener in a clip. I opened the thing and found inside a collection of little birds embedded in weak glue, which I have since discovered were larks in aspic, a highly-prized delicacy. However, concluding nurse had put them there for my use, I ate the lot and licked out the tin, and could have done with two more. I was most amazingly hungry.

ALL this time you must understand the stink I had first met in the cave was carrying on good and strong. Also there was no doubt as to what it was. I'd been to whaling stations on the Shetlands and Iceland for the Fishery Board, and knew their niff to a shade. Of course, a whale factory on inaccessible Niig was impossible, but then I'd come across so many other impossibilities during the last few hours that I'd come to be sceptical about their efficiency. Even the radiator with the cuddlesome ways, if you come to think about it, took a lot of beating. But whales don't catch themselves and get cut up automatically, and so the smell seemed to argue the presence of human beings, though in the light of recent experience I wasn't of course eliminating the *Hav* family, or the *Huldafolk*, or the rest of the local spooks who have carried on since the days when local literary gents in the Faröes wrote novels about them, and labelled them *sagas* for sale purposes.

So I crawled out through the tunnel entrance of my beehive and peeked round. There was a bit of a beach, but not much. There was a tidy sea lake in front with a lot of gulls swimming on it and gormandizing, and solan geese diving, and terns doing air stunts. And all round were black mountains, whitewashed here and there by the birds, and reaching up to blue heaven. Evidently the island of Niig was an ancient volcano, and where I sat now was the old crater, sea-flooded and cold. All of which, as you want to remark, is nothing new. But wait a bit. Out of the properties mentioned, how do you conjure up the whale stink? I couldn't.

When I peeked round again—and I had to do it gingerly, because my neck was still infernally stiff—it struck me that at the end of my bit of beach there was a fold in the rock, and there might be more beach beyond. So I creaked up on to my feet, and set out for a stroll.

In and out of the little foothills were some other beehive huts, very much like mine, though, instead of being plastered in pink, some were black, two were brown with daubings of Stockholm tar, and one was golden-yellow. I went up to the yellow one and prospected, and I'm hanged if it wasn't

* Mr. J. B. Barley measures five feet eight and a half inches in his shoes, and in dry clothes weighs eight stone seven pounds.—Ed.

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mud, pebble-dashed with gold dust and gold nuggets. I picked off a cigarette-case full of the nuggets—wait a bit—there they are. Bit of a trippery thing to do, but without the samples to show you fellows it would have sounded like a fish yarn. There were fourteen of these huts in all, and each was out of sight of the other, and, thinks I, the residents here must be a very shy and retiring crew. The red-haired man, J. J. Murgatroyd, of Wigan, I mentioned to you must have lived in one of them with his mer-wife.

GETTING round the next fold of the rocks was a tough job. The beach petered out, and the rocks were well painted by the sea-fowl, and as slippery as you please. As an ornithologist I've had practice on that kind of stone work in St. Kilda and Achill island, and places of that sort, as you know. My Board seems to enjoy sending me where I have to keep one eye on my neck and can only spare one for the Report. And I'm not nervous. But these rocks in the crater of Niig were the worst I'd sampled up to date.

However, I turned the corner at last, rather winded and covered in slime, and saw another beach, wider than the one with the merfolks' beehive huts, and the cause of the stink in plain sight. But for the moment I was otherwise engaged. Something big went past under water close at the foot of my rocks at about forty knots, and the wave it kicked up soused me to the ears, and it took me all my time to hold on. When the water ebbed, it left me speckled all over with little jellified things about the size of rice grains. My Report on that was worth all the Board's outlay for the trip, if the fools would only see it.

Do you get there now, you men? No? Well, the stuff was plankton, which is what whales feed on. And the beast that went by was a whale of sorts having his breakfast, and my crater lake was one of those whales' pet restaurants where the plankton breed in bulk, which is what you read about but never see.

There were two whale carcasses drawn up on some ways on the beach beyond, partly flensed, and there was a heap of bones as high as a church farther on, stinking to blazes. Also there were three local citizens who were taking more interest in me than I cared about.

I'm not a scrap nervous with foreigners as a general rule—Fishery Board officers can't afford to be. But I was with this crew. To start with, they didn't look to me wholesome, and anyway they were barely human, if that. When they gave you a back-view, you decided they had no heads. Bows-on, and at a distance, you were prepared to swear that their faces were down in the middle of their chests between their shoulders. Herodotus, wasn't it, who described people like that? Superior Victorians called Herodotus a liar. Well, I don't say the old gentleman wasn't, in spots. But, as regards a head-below-the-shoulder-blades man, I can believe he'd seen specimens. Anyway, there are some inside the Niig crater—nineteen of them, so far as my tally goes. Go and look for yourselves, you men, if you want to.

Two children I saw, little things of five foot high and six foot three. But the smallest grown-up, a man, was every inch of nine feet to the square top of his hump. The two gawkiest ones, both women, were twelve foot and twelve foot six, and must have weighed fifty to sixty stone apiece. The women, by the way, were bigger and heavier than the men, the reason being they had lifted more whale beef, walked less, and ate three rations to the men's one throughout the thousand years their tribe had lived on whale inside the Niig crater. They'd all got wool on them a foot long. Disgusting it made them look.

They were on me before I knew what was happening. A hairy hand about the size of a tea-tray flopped down and grabbed me, with one thumb at the side of my neck and fingers under the right armpit, and lifted me as though I'd been the scrag-end of a neck of mutton. I was howked off my perch on the slimy rock, chucked into the air, caught, and shied twenty yards on to the framework of a decaying whale that was hove-up on the beach. Luckily, the whale's ribs were resilient, or mine would have been stove in. Then a frolicsome twelve-footer—a lady, I thought, but both sexes were almost equally hairy—waddled along and tickled me with some poor old sailing ship's royal yard. When I slipped down between the ribs into festering horrors below so as to be out of reach, she kept on sportively fishing for me with the same gentle twenty-foot tool. I tell you people I didn't care for it one little bit. My Board don't pay me adequately to face that sort of amusement.

Then a steamer came alongside and made fast her siren string—or at least it sounded like that. Really, it was my guardian mermaid, and I may as well out with it that I'd called her "Alice" to myself all along. I don't know how Alice did it, but when she was mad, as she was then, with that hairy stinking giantess playing toss-ball with her little friend, she really could get a hell of a shout off her chest. The noise of her set all the sea-fowl putting on their hooters, and the giants bawled at the lot

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of them through their whiskers, and the high black and white cliffs of the crater chipped in with echoes, so that the total din ought to have carried to the moon or Paris.

Of course, my lady friend didn't come ashore. Not she. She knew her weakness. But she so rubbed the fear of what was coming next into those neckless woolly monstrosities that they plucked me out of my cage of whale-ribs, and actually licked the filth off me with their tongues. Particularly loathsome things the giants' tongues were, too; all rough and scratchy, like a cat's; and their breath reeked of high finner whale. It made quite a good footnote for my Report. Breath that had the flavour of shrimps and sea-water I got quite to like in time. But when anybody hiccups stale finner at me, I merely feel sick.

Then the giants hove me neck and crop into the sea, and Alice picked me up with a sweep of her arm, and set me pick-a-back on her plump shoulders, and steamed off down-coast with propeller going at half speed. I reckoned the pace to be about fourteen knots. By James, you chaps, if you want to see what neat naval architecture really is, just you sit on a mermaid's shoulder-blades and watch her work her tail! No dead-wood aft, and perfect streamline entrance.

Alice grounded with a bit of a jar, bows-on, just in front of her pink residence, and I pipped over her head on to the beach, as neat as you please. They were a bit rough, these Niig crater people, with ordinary human beings. The whale-fanciers, as I've told you, were just hairy giants, and poor, dear Alice herself was no chicken. She'd the most lovely figure I'd ever clapped eyes on, with a pink and white complexion, and a dimple at each side of her mouth, and another on each shoulder. She'd long black eyelashes, and big brown eyes that she worked for all they were worth. When we first met her hair was long and wavy, brownish in colour, and pretty fine. It never seemed to get caked or sticky with sea-water. One shake when she shot out to the surface, and there it was dry and kinky. I told her that if I hadn't been a married man I would have liked to play with her hair.* So I'm hanged if she didn't bob it, as if that would get my fancy, married or not! She said that when away on a summer holiday cruise she'd seen girls on the pier at Margate like that. And when I told her they were only low-class, she broke out into a regular tantrum of tears, and it took me half an hour to get her down to normal working order again. I tell you, though, she looked awfully fetching with it bobbed. She'd a beautifully-shaped head, and the hair had a natural wave, and a sort of silky sheen that—— Oh, all right, you men. I'll drop it if you like.

WEIGHT? What, Alice's weight? Well, I never had her on my knee, though I've sat on hers, the dear, as I've told you, lots of times. Oh, I suppose she'd scale about twenty-five or thirty stone, and take "outsize ladies" in clothes. As for height, I can't tell you. Of course, I never saw her standing up; mermaids don't. And as you are men here, I may as well tell you that out there inside Niig it's bad form to talk of anything below—er—below the waist of a mermaid. With a merman, of course, you can say any old thing you want. At least, I did. But then it's only fair to mention that the only merman I came across was the young fellow who was sparking Alice, and he was obviously streets away below her socially, and I hated to think that she might throw herself away on such a bounder. By James! you fellows, I wish I could get Alice to blow in on to the British coast some time, so that I could introduce you. She's absolutely the most beautifully-proportioned woman that ever happened in history. That is, down as far as the waist, of course. What? No, I'm damned if I'm going to talk about her tail. It's considered rotten bad form to mention such things amongst any class of merfolk.

Alice's young feller, as I've hinted, was an individual I'd like to shoot. He'd a soup-strainer moustache, which made him look like a walrus when it was wet, and he'd usually about four raw red wounds on his back and shoulders, new and fresh every day. He got those, so he said, scrapping with other mermen who said rude things about Alice, but personally I'm inclined to believe they came from fouling rocks and things when he was fishing, or exploring wrecks.

Of course, they are nailers at exploring wrecks, the merfolk, and as they supply the skinning knives, and the kettles, and so on to the hairy giant people on the beach next door, that's why they have the brutes so much under their thumbs. No civility, no salvage. I never heard of them getting anything back from the giants in return, except the whale smell, which is broadcasted free to everybody. But Alice said

* From *Burt's Biographies*. J. B. Barley, b. 3 Ap., 1888; 2nd s. late B. J. Barley, of Touchwood Hall, Derbyshire. Educ. Rugby and Oriel Coll., Oxon. M.A. 1910, Major R.A.F. in Great War, D.S.O., M.C.; m. 1921 Susan, 3rd d. Sir P. Stiffe. 1 s. 1 d. Is the well-known ornithologist. His book on "Parasites of the Corvidæ" is the classic on this obscure subject. Clubs: Birds' and R.A.F. Residences: The Dome, Thorshavn, Faröe Islands, and Dam House, Kettlewell, Yorkshire.

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A hairy hand about the size of a tea-tray flopped down and grabbed me.

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that the feeling that they, the merfolk, were the lords of creation gave them a warm sort of sensation in their tummies that was very comforting.

Alice—— By James! you men, if I'd been a bachelor, I swear I wouldn't have been in this club now. I pointed out to her that I should only be a sort of washerwoman's husband on Niig. I should never learn to swim well enough to catch the family fish, and so on, and she was fearsomely decent about it. She told me time and again that didn't matter a dump. A quiet life was what she was after, with me in the pink villa to come back to. She got pretty desperate about it, too. She'd fished up a set of rusty leg-irons from some old wreck or other, and one day when I was rather rubbing it in that—well, never mind. I believe I've mentioned she was quite as tall as I was and perhaps a bit taller. And as for strength, my aunt! She could have wrenched the boiler off a steam-roller. But I knew how to tackle her. She always purred when I dabbed a finger into any one of her four dimples. Dimples are a thing a woman always prinks about. I know a girl called Lucy who owns one, on one cheek, and who gets a hundred and two per cent. of its value from every—— All right, you men, I'll drop it.

WELL, then, leaving poor Lucy, and getting back to Alice, one day when I'd mentioned to her what a non-paying trade ornithology was, and how there was mighty little even in special commissions from the Fishery Board, she told me to shut my eyes whilst she squirmed away—as I've told you, a mermaid is awfully shy about letting you see her navigate when she's ashore—and allow her five minutes, and then to stroll up to the head of her particular ravine, and there I should see what I should see.

As a matter of fact it was a half-mud beehive clapped on to the rock wall, and a bit of a cave in the rock beyond. Anyway, it was Alice's bank, or store-house, or museum, or whatever you like to call it. Inside was the funniest collection of junk you ever clapped eyes on.

All merfolk are collectors of salvage. One that I knew collected ships' steering wheels, another binnacles, another drip-lubricators. The boss of our beach, a bald-headed old boy with a green and white chin beard, was an ambergris fancier. Nasty, grey, smelly-looking stuff it was. But his collection, turned into cash, would buy up this club and everybody in it ten times over. My Board merely thought I was lying when I estimated the quantity in my Report. The whole crowd of them all gathered up galley tackle which they gave to the giants, and I've seen those neckless monstrosities eat their tinned peas with lion-marked silver sauce ladles. A stout old mer-woman at the north end of our beach specialized in gold-dust, and pebble-dashed the outside of her town house with it. Gold dust, you men! Lick your lips and think of it! Alice told me this old bird had once an English husband for a bit, and showed me a brass tobacco box, with his name on it. He was the J. J. Murgatroyd I've told you about, and the address was Wigan. He apparently had left Niig two years before I arrived. I want to come across the fellow because his stout old wife gave me a memento to take back to England for him when I left. J. J. Murgatroyd the chap's name was, and I gathered that he'd extremely red hair.

Alice's line was jewellery. Colour and quantity were her two main points, poor dear, and she'd enough barber's necklaces and toyshop emeralds to ballast a racing five-tonner. The mud shelves of her museum were piled with them. She was a most industrious collector. But, like the distaff end of our breed here in England, she was more omnivorous than discerning. Still, she'd some decent stuff. She'd quite a heap of pearl necklaces. Mrs. Barley, as you men will have noticed, was wearing one when we turned her out of the Birds' Club before dinner. To avoid complications, I told her I bought it out of poker winnings from you lads here. So don't give me away. Our second-hand twelve Austin came out of a few pearls from a pendant. But Alice had no use for diamonds; nasty colourless things she said they were, and she'd an overrated idea of the value of Mizpah rings. In one cruise down the West African coast she'd collected no fewer than fifty-nine Mizpahs of unalloyed native gold, with inscription all present and correct, and seemed to think they represented an emperor's ransom. But in cold cash one hundred and fifty pounds would probably have covered the lot. Whereas the diamonds that she had let slither away to the sea floor would have been worth as many thousands. Great James! It makes me sick to think about! And there was I at the time not even able to afford a second-hand cine-microscope.

"With all my worldly goods," says Alice, with a wave of her pretty hand round the store, "I thee endow. Wiltest thou?" or, of course, words to that effect. She'd beautiful hands. You men needn't throw things. I'm not talking out of common vanity. And I admit that the wording is probably all wrong. I'm only giving you the general effect. And if I'd been a

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bachelor I'm damned if I wouldn't have tumbled, although she was, I suppose, a bit taller than I am. You never saw an ordinary woman with such a figure as Alice has got, or felt such perfect silky hair. After she bobbed it—well, never mind that. As to the grub, you soon get used to raw fish. Besides, the merfolk have got all sorts of topping sea salads we never dream about, and of course oysters *ad lib.* We'd whisky or champagne for every meal. At least, I had. Alice was strict T.T. Between whiles, if you've a fancy that way, you can always wade into things out of tins, which they bring up from wrecks. I can't say I ever did much in that line myself. Besides, it was rather looked down upon by the merfolk. Eating tinned stuff was considered rather gianty.

So for that matter was any kind of overeating. Alice and her younger friends dined rather sparingly. She always said they'd their figures to consider. And judging from the only two elderly merwomen I saw—Mrs. J. J. Murgatroyd, and one I wasn't introduced to—they were about right. The giants made a daily habit of gorging, and had done for a thousand years, which was one reason, I suppose, why they were giants. They killed *grinda-quealur*, and *doglin*, and *finners*, and any other kind of whales that dived in through the underwater channels to browse on the plankton in our crater lake, and they cut off the beef in slices, and packed it along on their flat apices to the family cold-storage cave, to gormandize on as and when required. Winter snows and ice provided the refrigerating material, and blubber lamps did the cooking. They were very self-contained monstrosities, our hairy giants, except for tools and luxuries (like tinned peas), which was the one thing that gave their overlords the half-nelson on them. I made a very good point of that in my Report, but I bet my Board only pigeon-hole it because they haven't a file it will fit.

There was another beach at the head of the lake, and Alice swam me there one day, and pointed out a beautiful house-site, with a rill of water laid on, and a ready-made store-cave running into the mountain at the back. She said it could be arranged, if I thought fit, to bring across a young giant and keep it there, and use it as a sort of cook-housemaid. She'd already stocked a couple of swivel dining-chairs upholstered in red plush, from some wrecked steamer's saloon, to give point to the argument. It was really a beautiful spot, and the beach shingle was mostly made up of agates. I collected a couple of pocketfuls of topping specimens. It was this last suggestion of our setting up housekeeping together that spilt the beans, so far as I was concerned. But I'll tell you about that presently. We'd a bit of a mishap on the way home. A shoal of red mullet swam athwart our course when we were about half-way over, and the "woodcock of the sea" is a thing no mermaid can resist. Of course, Alice dived in chase without thinking, and there was me, all ballasted with agates, squattering round like a surplus kitten in a wash-tub. Alice said I was a good twenty feet down when she retrieved me.

It is pretty beastly getting nearly drowned like that. But being brought round by Alice was nearly worth it. Astonishingly warm-blooded creature, a mermaid. Their skin temperature's always far hotter than ours. I suppose it's that which makes them so affectionate. And you've no idea of the luxury of their cuddle.

THERE was a council meeting next morning of all hands. Word must have been passed round over half the North Sea, for quite fifty of the merfolk turned up, and most of them were strangers to me. They fringed the beach in just enough water for their tails to be grounded. There was a boulder, just awash, opposite Alice's pink house, and the chairman sat himself on that. He was our head boss, a scarred old fellow, thirty stone good, with a bald head, and a green and white chin beard, and shaggy white eyebrows, and long white eyelashes. I believe I've told you all the merfolk ran to long eyelashes. Alice's were topping.

Well, there was a bit of cackling, and the long and short of it was Alice was in a minority of two. The only other voter on her side was the stout Mrs. J. J. Murgatroyd. None of the rest had any use for me. I wasn't self-providing. They had been told the landfolk were full of useful inventions, but I had shown no evidence of same. The red-haired J. J. Murgatroyd had been the same kind of disappointment. And, finally, they disliked my looks. Up till now they had concluded that sister Alice was just amusing herself with a new toy, and though her tastes had made them all feel rather sick, they had said nothing and let her carry on. But that trip to the little beach at the head of the loch had put the tin hat on it. Alice was hotter stuff than they'd guessed. Alice clearly meant business. And Alice, in short, wasn't going to be let.

Of course, I was furious. But you can't go and knock the head off a merman with a green and white chin beard if he weighs thirty stone and is separated from you by twenty feet of deep water. At least, I can't, or, at any rate, didn't. I'm a lightweight. And the final vote of the meeting

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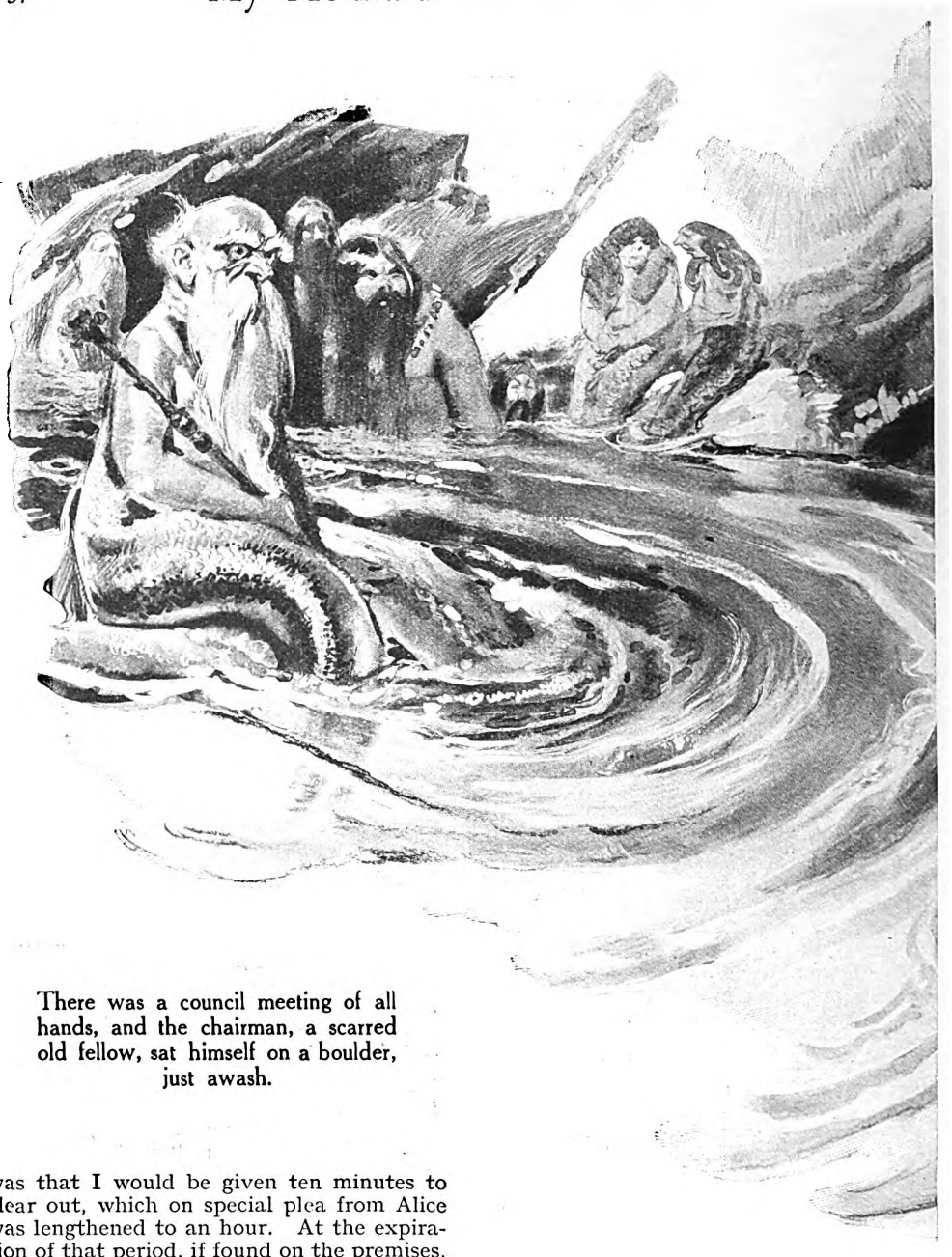

There was a council meeting of all hands, and the chairman, a scarred old fellow, sat himself on a boulder, just awash.

was that I would be given ten minutes to clear out, which on special plea from Alice was lengthened to an hour. At the expiration of that period, if found on the premises, I was to be handed over to the giant folk as a supper dish. Alice's young man with the scars and the walrus moustache went into perfectly unnecessary details as to how I should eat. But I've told you before that merman always struck me as a horrid bounder. I commented on his habits in my Report in such a way that one of the Board put a supplementary question in a marginal note.

I don't know if Alice had been prepared for some time for a romance with an unhappy ending like ours—you see, the poor dears have no novels, and must have some kind of amusement—but after the meeting had adjourned to fish for its lunch, she and that walrus-moustache bounder (blast him) swam out into the middle of the crater lake

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and dived, and after a bit came up again, tugging something to the surface.

Ye gods! It was a rusty old ship's steel life-boat, no less. They rockered some of the water out of it and shoved it ashore, where we bailed the rest. It stank of sea muck and weed, but was stanch enough all the same. There were a couple of oars still lashed along the thwarts.

My hour's law was getting short, and those

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hairy monstrosities on the next beach, who had been given news of the possible supper dish, were making sucking noises with their mouths, which, added to their natural smell, made me feel rather sick. My Alice gave me one last long, lingering, hot squeeze, and scooped me, *dump*, ten feet from shore to boat. She threw a mildewed suit-case of keepsakes on top of me, and then she and the walrus shoved off.

They put their hands on the sternpost of the old lifeboat, and sculled with their tails, and we crossed the crater lake at twenty knots, with two bow-waves a dozen feet high sluicing beside us. Then, slowing down, we shot into a sea-cave, and how they threaded the twisting of those waterways through to the outer side of Niig I can't tell you. I think the merfolk can see in the dark, or at any rate in the gloom, a heap better than we can. But at last we shot the opening that the Colonel and I and the other comic opera Faröe fishermen had used, waiting cannily for a trough, and there we were rolling up and down on a good old North Sea swell, with Levanten village just across the Sound.

Alice and I had just one more long, wonderful, hot kiss, and that's about the end of it. Shrimps and seaweed? Good lord, no, you men. She'd the sweetest breath of any woman in all the world. And the most beautiful figure. Where on earth did you get the shrimps and seaweed idea from?

I paddled myself across to Levanten, where it seems I was expected. The comic opera outfit were all combing their whiskers and scratching themselves on the sea wall. The Colonel and the other woollies had got out of the cave all right, and reported that the *Huldafolk* were in charge and that I should blow in again as good as new in three weeks' time. Which is what I did. The gingery J. J. Murgatroyd had done much the same thing two years previously. I know you men think the whole thing is impossible. But if you go out to Levanten and hunt up dates, you'll see it all fits in to a nicety. Pump the Colonel. For details see my Report to the Fishery Board, which you can buy in Blue-book shape for sevenpence-ha'penny.

The Colonel has a pair of Zeiss binoculars, bagged from a wrecked Hun submarine. He had spotted my tin boat coming out of the cave. "I see dem two propellers behind yo' stern," the Colonel kindly explained to me. "They make yo' ole boat move pretty dam quick. Then I see them cast off, and you came here to Levanten under oars, the slowest I ever see. You stay here, Mistor, and I give you lessons on how to row a boat. *Huldafolk* no dam good for teaching that. They push boats, all same as a *Havfrue* pushes. You find *Havfrue* naice, Mistor?"

THE mildewed suit-case was full of my poor girl's hopeless loot for the most part. But some of the pearls were real, and bar one rope, which is used by the members of my household, I sold the balance and invested the proceeds as you know. Also, I bought that second-hand Austin twelve, which we call Alice, and the missus always wonders why. Did I tell you about the Austin?

I think that's about the lot at present. But I keep on the house at Thorshavn—have to, you know—for ornithological and Fishery Board work; and of course I may drift up against Alice again. I hope she hasn't chucked herself away on that walrus-moustached bounder.

Waiter! waiter! Double whisky and large soda, please. I believe I've been talking quite a time. I wonder how I'm to find out where that red-headed J. J. Murgatroyd lives now? He's left Wigan and gone to sea again. And I don't want to keep his stout old merwife's memento for too long. It won't keep indefinitely.

My main trouble has been, of course, that my Report to the Fishery Board on *Seal Breeding in Niig* is rotten. But the new stuff in it is priceless.

"You certainly have earned an M.V.O., or one of those things," said one of the men who had been listening.

"A C.B. is what I expect for the job," said J. B. Barley.

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Dickens and His Characters

By Robert Lynd

With Special Illustrations by
FRANK REYNOLDS, R.I.

"WHAT a face is his to meet in a drawing-room!" said Leigh Hunt, after meeting Dickens for the first time. "It has the life and soul in it of fifty human beings." A prodigious vitality seems to have been a characteristic of most of the great novelists—of Scott and Dumas and Balzac and Tolstoy, for example—but in sheer excess of vitality I think Dickens surpassed them all. Human beings have marvelled for centuries at the feats of the strong men of old—of Samson and of Hercules—but the superhuman vigour of Samson and of Hercules seems to me to be less marvellous than the superhuman vigour of Charles Dickens. If he had never lived, who could have believed that the existence of such a man was possible—a man with the eyes of fifty human beings, with the vivacity of fifty human beings, with the sympathy of fifty human beings—a man from whose imagination living characters tumbled like apples from an apple-orchard during an autumn gale? And to each of these characters he imparts a measure of his own extraordinary vitality, of which he also imparts a measure to each of us as we read. That is why we still read Dickens and re-read him, paying no heed to those who tell us that there is no poetry in his work, no philosophy, and no psychology.

It was often said during Dickens's lifetime that the wonderful people were exaggerations and even caricatures, and this criticism is still frequently repeated. There was no criticism of his work that made Dickens more angry. He would not admit that he had exaggerated even in his picture of Mr. Squeers of Dotheboys Hall, in "Nicholas Nickleby." "Mr. Squeers and his school," he declared, emphatically, "are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible." If this is true, then surely the original Squeers must have been a Yorkshire schoolmaster with horns and cloven hoof and a tail, for in most other respects the Squeers of Dickens is as near being a devil as a human being could well be. Still, there is something to be said for Dickens's defence of his realism. We do not accuse a microscope of exaggerating because it shows us a drop of pond-water crowded with monsters to the existence of which we should otherwise be blind, and Dickens happened to be a man of genius who possessed eyes that not only saw what everybody sees in the ordinary way, but saw what other people would be able to see only with the aid of microscope, telescope, and field-glasses. As a result, his portraits often seem distortions of fact to those of us who think that we ourselves see everything. But the fault may be in our own eyes, not in Dickens's. He himself raised the question in the preface to "Martin Chuzzlewit" "whether it is *always* the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull." Of one thing we may be certain. Dickens's characters are not the faked inventions of a

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deliberate exaggerator: he actually saw human beings as he wrote of them. If he exaggerated, it was his eyes that exaggerated and not his pen in giving an account of what his eyes had seen. It might be said of him, indeed, that one of his chief characteristics as a novelist is observation in glorious excess.

Dickens himself said that the more accurately he drew a character from life, the more its reality was sure to be questioned by the very kind of person from whom he had drawn it. "I have never," he declared, "touched a character precisely from the life but some counterpart of that character has incredulously asked me: 'Now, really, did I ever really see one like it?'" How he would have appreciated the testimonial of a London barrister, now dead, who once said to me: "There is not a single character in Dickens's novels whom I have not met in real life. For a long time there was just one. I had never met Tommy Traddles. Then, just as I was giving up hope, I met even Tommy Traddles!"

Still, exuberant imagination and an exuberant comic sense were as important elements in his genius as his Argus eyed gift of observation. Who cares whether he ever observed Silas Wegg or the Artful Dodger or Cuttle? All these characters are born out of the playfulness of the most playful imagination in the history of fiction, and even if we believed that they were false to ordinary life, we should no more question their right to exist than we should question the right to exist of the unicorn in the nursery rhyme. As soon as one of them appears, we throw criticism to the wind and are as unquestionably happy as children watching a conjurer. And, indeed, Dickens had in him something of the conjurer and showman. He was a professional entertainer, extremely conscious of the great public whom he wished to entertain, and, though he sometimes turned the novel into a platform and even into a pulpit, he also turned it simultaneously as a rule into a theatre or a theatre of varieties. He was, as everybody knows, an enthusiastic amateur actor, and Forster assures us that he was unrivalled as a stage-manager: "He took everything on himself. . . . He was stage-director, very often stage-carpenter, scene-manager, property-man, prompter, and bandmaster." Is there not a hint of the masterly "producer" in the very make-up and costume of his characters as they step up to the footlights in his stories? Consider, for example, the care with which he dresses that precociously sinful urchin, the Artful Dodger, in "Oliver Twist." He first gives us a portrait of the dirty, delightful youth in a few lines—his snub nose, his flat brow, his common face, his dirtiness, his grown-up air (though he was diminutive even for his age), his rather "bow-legs and little sharp ugly eyes." Then he proceeds to dress him:—

"His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly that it threatened to fall off every moment: and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels.—He had turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves; apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He was altogether as roistering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four foot six in his bluchers."

That kind of writing may, at first sight, seem easy. And, indeed, it is nearly as easy as inventing the costume, the shuffle, and the eye-play of Charlie Chaplin. Anyone could do it if he had the genius. Charles Dickens, like Charlie Chaplin, can give an enormous importance to any part of the human costume. He seems to endow clothes with the very life and character of the person who wears them. The Artful Dodger has already conquered us before he has uttered a word of Cockney slang or pinched a handkerchief out of an elderly gentleman's pocket.

There are few of the Dickens characters chosen by Mr. Frank Reynolds as subjects for his charming and skilful portraiture whom Dickens has not himself portrayed in prose in every significant detail of costume as well as of characteristic gesture and speech. In "Dombey and Son," Captain Cuttle has only to enter the parlour in order to blaze into life—"a gentleman in a wide suit of blue, with a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist; very bushy black eyebrows; and a thick stick in his left hand, covered all over (like his nose) with knobs. He wore a loose black silk handkerchief round his neck, and such a very large coarse shirt-collar that it looked like a small sail." Add to this "such a hard glazed hat as a sympathetic person's head might ache at the sight of, and which left a red rim round his own forehead as if he had been wearing a tight basin," and you already know the man almost as intimately as when he takes up a glass of special Madeira and, before drinking it, asks, "*The?*" and Solomon Gills replies as laconically, "*The.*" I do not mean to suggest that our affection for the Captain has not grown by the time he gives young Walter Gay his famous advice: "Walter, my boy,

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Mr. Pickwick.

("*Pickwick Papers.*")

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Samuel Weller.

("*Pickwick Papers.*")

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Trotty Veck.

(" *The Chimes.*")

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Mr. Micawber.

("*David Copperfield.*")

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Montague Tigg.

(" *Martin Chuzzlewit.*")

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Cheeryble Brothers.

(*"Nicholas Nickleby."*)

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The Artful Dodger.

("*Oliver Twist.*")

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Captain Cuttle.

(*"Dombey and Son."*)

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(Continued from page 576)

in the Proverbs of Solomon you will find the following words: 'May we never want a friend in need or a bottle to give him.' When found, make a note of," and solemnly repeats as he takes the boy by the hand: "When-found make a note of." But I do think that Dickens excels all other authors in making his characters known to us for our laughter and our liking at the first introduction.

There are one or two of his characters, indeed—even of his memorable characters—who seem to me positively to lose a part of their vitality after their first introduction. Is Trotty Veck ever quite so real again as in those first pages of "The Chimes," in which we see the little ticket-porter, as he waits for a job, trotting up and down outside the church-door in his leaky shoes to keep himself warm, while his little apron is blown over his head by the wind "like a naughty boy's garments"?

In "Martin Chuzzlewit," again, Montague Tigg seems to me a more real figure in the early shabby days when he tries to borrow from Mr. Pecksniff "the ridiculously small amount," as he puts it, "of eighteenpence" than in the later luxurious days of swindling that lead to his murder.

On the other hand, Dickens's greatest characters retain their greatness and even add to it as the story advances. It is doubtful if, when Dickens began the "Pickwick Papers" at the age of twenty-four, he himself entirely realized what kind of immortal darling he had brought into existence. When we meet Mr. Pickwick first, he is simply an amiable eccentric with a bald head and round spectacles who has "traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead, and agitated the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats"; so little is told us even of his appearance that Seymour, in illustrating the story, sketched him at first as a long, thin man. Luckily, Chapman, of the firm of Chapman and Hall, persuaded him to alter the drawing and to model Pickwick on a friend of his, "a fat old beau, who would wear, in spite of the ladies' protests, drab tights and black gaiters." Who knows how much Dickens may have owed to this inspiring emendation? To us nowadays a long, thin Pickwick is as inconceivable as a fat Don Quixote. His figure and his clothes have by this time almost as sure a place in our affections as his character.

Mr. Frank Reynolds, R.I.
Photo: Elliott & Fry.

As to who is the greatest of Dickens's characters, the final choice would probably lie among four men—Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, Mr. Micawber, and Mr. Pecksniff. At the same time, who could say there is anything nearer comic perfection in his or any other writer's novels than Silas Wegg or Sairey Gamp? Whether Dickens's contemporary illustrators—Phiz and Cruikshank and the rest—did full justice to this noble and crowded gallery of characters is a question on which ardent Dickensians differ. It was too much to expect that he could find artists of the same enormous capacity for both hilarity and tenderness as himself, but, lacking his exuberance, they seem to many readers to have made his characters uglier and more grotesque than was necessary. We shall always turn back to their illustrations with curiosity and pleasure, but also with a sense that there is something wanting. That is why we should welcome the attempts of modern artists like Mr. Reynolds to recreate the old characters a little less gnome-like and more capable of living in a world on which the sun shines.

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PETER PIPER'S PICKLE

By

COSMO HAMILTON

Illustrated by
L. G. ILLINGWORTH

"*Ah, c'est Paris,*" said Peter, flinging back the shutters of the windows of his bridal suite in the Continental Hotel.

He and his pretty Pansy had just arrived on the insolent Blue Train. The crossing from Dover to Calais had had amazing inequalities.

"In other words," he added, performing that trick with his hat which made all London laugh, "So this is Paris, what?"

A little green, and even then mentally going down on one huge wave and up on another, Pansy arrived unsteadily at an arm-chair, but timed it perfectly. Not for nothing was she a *première danseuse*.

"And we'll splash off on a reckless and extravagant honeymoon, eh, what?" He twirled an imaginary walking-stick and pretended to stumble over a pin.

"Yes," she said, with a wan smile at his antics—she had been in the same musical comedy for two seasons. "That'll be nice, old thing."

Whereupon, with a boyish and natural air of off-stage pride at being a man of wealth, he slapped the place in which he had deposited his pocket-book and nearly uttered a scream. The smart new leather case on which were stamped the initials of his comic but actual name had gone.

Every penny that he owned in the world was in it—the five hundred pounds which he had saved by dint of gruesome economy in order to give his tiny wife a regal honeymoon. And he had not, as he immediately discovered with accumulating gooseflesh, put this vital thing in any other pocket. Either it had been stolen by a peculiarly heartless bandit or he had left it in the cab. If the first had happened he was marked down for ever in the estimation of the shrewd and careful Pansy as an easy mark, a mere irresponsible person. And if the second were the cause of a ruined honeymoon and the tragedy of his life, he was bound to hear the story of his gross stupidity at every meal, including breakfast, until he doddered to the grave.

Something had to be done. Some stroke of genius, some act of brilliant ingenuity such as was to be expected from one of the greatest laughter-makers of the London stage, had to be performed on the spur of that frightful moment. Otherwise a long-looked-forward-to honeymoon would be blasted and the character of an admirable and lovable little man smashed for ever.

It must be understood that Piper had emptied his bank account. He had no father upon whom he could draw, no friends from whom he could borrow, and nothing that he could sell. He was in a city where his name meant nothing, of whose language he knew no more than a few nonsensical phrases, and in which there wasn't a single soul to whom he could appeal.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Pansy. "Still feeling a wee bit sick?"

"As sick as a poisoned dog." In his face there was the urge to cut his throat.

Very much astonished, the girl looked up. A little thing she was, with extraordinarily small bones, a round face with baby eyes, a dangerously kissable mouth, and something

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that passed for a nose. Extremely pretty and instantly to be liked, she had the emergency manner that goes with a nurse. Neat, too, of course, and beautifully turned out.

"That's a flattering remark to make," she said, "on a honeymoon."

Whereat, greatly ashamed, Peter erased his tactless footprints with a layer of sand. "The good old Channel," he said, giving a beautiful imitation of a land-lubber walking a tilting deck, "and its interior aftermath."

"Oh, that! Yes, I know what you mean." And she closed her eyes again.

And then, the while he duplicated his well-known theatre indication of reckless enjoyment, that harassed and pitiful creature set his thoughts at work. He had never acted so well.

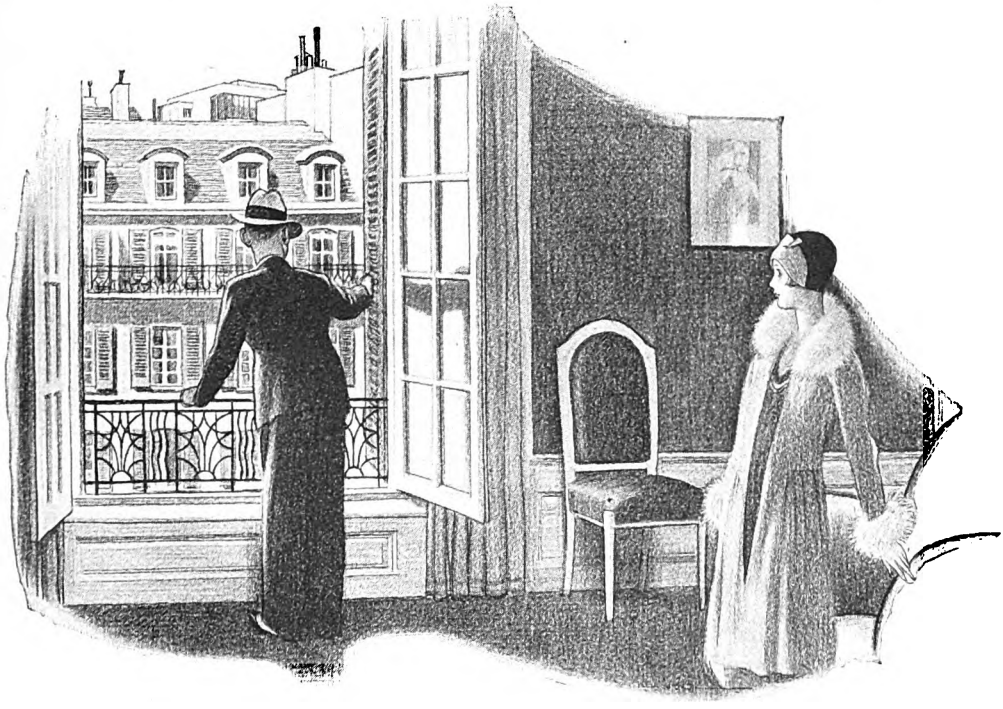
He said to himself: "You silly ass, what you need is time. Never in history was there such a crisis as this. Inspiration—that's what you want, you simple village idiot. What you've got to do, and quick—but how, by Golly, how?—is to put poor Pansy out. She must be rendered unconscious for a bit. If she sees what a fool you've made of yourself and the mess you've put her in you may as well—or as lief, as Huntley had it—swallow a fat little bullet through the medium of a gun." Even at such a moment, being a born actor, he thought in the sort of language that he employed in his "dam'-fool" parts. "I must have at least twelve hours in which to earn, borrow, or wangle some money. A sleeping draught, by gum!"

He went for the idea with the alacrity of a desert man for water. Yes, if he could work it, that was the one way out. (It was hopeless to expect that the taxi-driver would bring his pocket-book back.)

"Pansy," he said, in a medical voice, "you don't look well, old pet. You don't; believe me, you don't. Now, now, it's no good saying you do. I'm looking at you with loving eyes and I tell you, reluctantly, that I think the word is bed."

"What?" She had felt all right, though tired, half a moment ago. But nothing is so instantly calculated to make one look unwell as to be told that one does so in a sympathetic voice. The power of suggestion is irresistible. "Bed has a lovely sound," she added, "but it's so early. What about you?"

"Me! Tah!" He kissed her two or three times. "What's it matter about me?



"*Çà, c'est Paris,*" said Peter, flinging back the shutters of the windows of his bridal suite in the Continental Hotel.

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Popsy-Wopsy's all done in, what with the excitement and the old shoes, the confetti and losing her lunch, and must be put between the sheets." He kissed her all over again.

In very truth it had been a strenuous day. Shot by several cameras and attended by every member of the Garden Theatre, in which "The Girl on the Motor-Bike" had been running for a year, the marriage had been more or less solemnized at a register office at nine o'clock. The train journey, that unspeakable crossing, the opulent dash to Paris—no wonder such a little person didn't look very well.

Following up his desperate thought, and adopting a bedside manner, he led the way into the next room—a large one with a bath and running water.

Sympathetically, but with a touch of farce, Peter opened the bed, and then with genuine sensitiveness kissed his hand to his little bride and retired from the room.

BY an extremely lucky accident, the man who had brought up the luggage had left the dressing-case in which he had packed some medicines in the palatial and Empire *salon*, so that, without having to go through any subtleties, he could lay his hand immediately on the sleeping-draught without which he never moved. Comparatively young as he was, he suffered from insomnia, probably because of his efforts to amuse on the stage, from which he had not recovered when the hour for sleep arrived. No one but a comedian knows what immense energies are required nightly in order to appear to be effortless to the well-fed people in front, and Peter was invariably exhausted when, a grave and pumped-out man, he returned to his flat at night.

And so he mixed an overdose, hoping that it would put dear Pansy out for fifteen hours at least, which would give him from half-past five that evening to half-past eight the following morning in which to retrieve his position and acquire cash. But how? If the Green Room Club had been within reach—but that was another story. And while the small-boned Pansy prepared herself for bed, her tragi-comic husband sat in an attitude of concentrated thought.

He was a nice little man, was Peter, wiry and well-built, though small. Not much more than five feet six inches on a brick, very smartly dressed in a waisted coat with padding under his arms, tight sleeves and little cuffs, and trousers wide and full; the gallant tie of the Thespids, his theatrical cricket club, and a tight little collar with stripes. Nature, who had endowed him with every laughter-making trick, had inconsistently provided him with a tragedian's face. In fact, she had given him, in her supreme generosity, the appearance of one who suffered not only from dyspepsia, but a sense of the hollow mockery of life. Off stage there was a distinct air of pathos about him, disappointment, and pain, which had been the cause of his rapid rise from a chorus man to one who had the satisfaction of seeing his name gleam in electric light. And as he sat in a Rodin attitude, carved rather in putty than in stone, he screwed that prop in his right eye, glassless, through which he only had to look at his audience to win a round of applause.

He said to himself: "Come on, you Jubilee Juggins, whatever grey matter you think you have got must be worked for all it's worth. Think, think, you fool. At least a hundred quid must be achieved before Pansy comes to. And then I can put up a bluff for a couple of weeks or so."

"Peter."

"Yes, Birdie."

"You can come in now. At least, I suppose you can. I shall have to get used to this." There was a little gurgling laugh.

With the glassless rim of gold screwed into his eye from force of habit, Peter found Pansy lying in bed with the clothes about her ears. It has been said that she was very small, and even then she was neat. Not one of her shingled, glistening hairs was out of its proper place, and, quite unnecessarily, her schoolgirl complexion had been touched with powder and rouge—retouched, perhaps one should say.

With an exquisite touch of casualness, which Pansy was not sure that she liked, Peter went to the window and did something to the blind. A thoughtful man was Peter, a gentleman in fact. And then, as he hummed "My Heart Stood Still," he approached the bed with the sleeping-draught not too steady in his hands. He kissed her and said: "Darling Popsie-Wopsie, you must take this. Just a little sedative, deary, which I understand from ancient travellers is soothing to the tummy after a nasty go of the sea."

"Good Lord!" she said. "What is it? Not a sleeping-draught?"

"A thousand noes," he said; "a sleeping-draught, deary!" He was astonished, in fact he was rather shocked. "No, no; bicarbonate of soda, deary, with a few drops of bismuth which will do the trick. One, two, three, go!"

With utter trustfulness she took it, holding her nose. She was a healthy little person—who could fail to be healthy with so much exercise? She had danced all through the run of the play and practised on the quiet. The muscles of her calves

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were like a bicyclist's. "What about you?" she said.

"Well, old thing, as for me, I shall proceed reluctantly downstairs, buy a few picture postcards of Paris, and peck a little meal perhaps, in order to kill time." Whereat he kissed her again and retired to the door.

"Oh, Peter," she said, "you idiot, take that thing out of your eye."

But by that time he had gone. It fell out of his eye in the sitting-room, in which he could be himself—the funny man who could be un-funny for a change. And there he paced the floor for twenty minutes in another ecstasy of thought. What, what was he to do? Then, like a man who drops through twelve thousand feet in a faulty parachute, he went out into the passage and, not knowing that *ascenseur* meant lift, walked all the way downstairs.

Much life was going on. People were arriving and departing. The inevitable crowd of inquirers surrounded the concierge —that man of patient tact, of many languages, and with the crossed keys on his coat. At a cubby-hole in the elegant wall a queue of eager ladies were booking seats to see things that were better left unseen. A few belated people were having tea at marble-topped tables which were arranged on the mosaic floor. And behind three tempting Martinis in the courtyard there were three Americans, charming-looking men, from Yale or Harvard, to whom Paris was the Mecca of their dreams.

Peter had cocked his little dump hat, which turned up at the back and flopped forward in the front, at its usual rakish angle. He wore white spats, in spite of their being wholly out of date, but they, like his eyeglass, were props; and with a gardenia stuck in his buttonhole, a stick almost as tall as himself, an unlighted cigarette lopping from the corner of his mouth, he went out into the open court to see what air would do. Once there, and unconsciously, but with the ineradicable feeling of an actor that the limelight was upon him, he paced about with bent knees and with his feet turned in—that goose-like walk which had been adopted by the late George Huntley and had become *de rigueur* with every other comedian.

HE became aware almost immediately that he was affording immense and exquisite amusement to the three Americans. Bursts of suppressed laughter came from their table, and one of them as he watched became almost ill with mirth.

Peter, seeing a sail, so to speak, on the horizon, the first faint gleam of hope, began to exaggerate his little strut, his bored expression, and his open-mouthed vacuity, and to work nearer and nearer to the table. He was able thus to hear what was being said—"I've seen 'em on the stage, but Holy Moses, I didn't think they walked about in life"—"The dam'-fool Englishman in every detail"—"Boys, I don't believe it's true. We're seeing things——"

Peter murmured a prayer. Here, by the grace of God and these three men, who, being American, were the wealthy of the world, was rescue. He took the bull by the horns. He stopped, listened, registered surprise, and then, with a slightly petulant air, approached. He said: "Ah—am I to understand that you are by any chance laughing at me? I am not in the least averse to causing you that great and glorious feeling which alone comes from that expression of risibility peculiar to the human species and certain breeds of jackass, but I must confess to a slight surprise that I, of all people, am the cause of such a thing." He pretended that his stick was a billiard cue in order that he might make a cannon with their glasses.

There was another and a louder yell, which echoed through the high walls of the hotel.

And Peter said to himself, with a strange and pathetic excitement: "Right you are, my lads; now for all my stunts." He balanced his stick on the ground and caught it as it was about to fall. He took off his hat, put the brim on the tip of his nose, and with a little wriggle let it flop back on his head. He stumbled over imaginary pins, gyrated round the table with the action of a man on skates, and went through, in rapid succession, all the historic and histrionic tricks which began in pantomime and have been brought to a musical play.

He had never done so well or risen to such heights. And all the while he wore his dyspeptic expression and that tragic air of despondency.

And finally, rather tired and a little ashamed of himself, he drew up a chair to the table and said: "That'll cost you a hundred quid, which, at the current quotation in the financial columns, is nine hundred and sixty-eight dollars fifty-seven cents." At which there was a further roar. That was the funniest thing he had said, because, naturally enough, the Americans were betting themselves that Peter was a Peer—that he was Lord Augustus something or other with a couple of hyphens or so—and therefore a man with a yacht, one or two valets, a P. G. Wodehouse butler. He'd several of those English houses which they saw in *Country Life*.

"Upon my soul it will," said Peter. "I tell you straight I've put into the last ten

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minutes a concentrated and intense edition of a whole week's work. For which my inadequate remuneration is covered by the sum I mentioned. You can't expect a professional to work so hard for nothing. My name," he added, " is Peter Piper—who's in a pickle—and I take it you've heard of that."

But as these men had landed at Cherbourg and had not yet been to London, Peter was wrong. That name conveyed nothing to them. The fame of the star of the Garden Theatre had never reached their ears. One by one they retired to recover.

They were under the impression, of course, that they had struck a little man who was what was called in their amusing slang " Bughouse." That is to say, someone who was balmy, off his nut, a harmless lunatic. Or else he was one of those Englishmen of whom they had heard who, possessing that subtle and curious sense of humour which is brought about by continual fogs and an almost total lack of sun, went about pulling people's legs.

At any rate, they were wholly convinced that he was a Peer, because they had been in the habit of looking through the glossy pages of the *Tatler*, in which they saw, reading from left to right, groups of exactly such men as Peter sitting on shooting sticks with their mothers and sisters, wives and best girls, and the comic garments which only the aristocracy could afford to wear. Then, too, they argued, through the doors of their adjoining rooms, which were open, the man had called himself Peter Piper, which was quite enough to prove, apart from his screamingly funny demand for a hundred pounds, that he had bats in the belfry, nothing much over the beads. And then, of course, they thought of something else.

BUT there was the wretched Peter alone in the draughty court, one down on the first nine holes of his desperate adventure, wondering what to do. He had read among the nightly sensations in the evening papers of hold-ups, desperadoes who in the most crowded places stuck a gun suddenly into people's ribs, saying nastily: " Come on now, hand it over," and immediately collected enough money to run a cottage hospital for a year, or, if they were not philanthropists, to settle the demands for income-tax and buy a new Rolls-Royce. Peter hadn't a gun. He had never had a gun. He hated guns. He shuddered at the mere idea of hurting a living soul or of giving himself an unexpected wound in a vital part. In fact, he was so kind a little man that nearly all his brother actors touched him for a bit, stray dogs followed him down deserted streets, tame canaries sang their best for him, and even parrots had been known, grumpy as they are, to run through the gamut of their repertory for his benefit.

All the same, he looked about him experimentally, seeing fat and prosperous gentlemen singly and in twos, with big cigars in their teeth, any one of whom could probably cough up an enormous wad of rolls if only he had the courage suddenly to dig the mouthpiece of his pipe in one of their tender spots and speak hoarsely under his breath.

Almost without a thought, however, his thumb went down on that. Could he, by Jove, could he play the gigolo, smarm up to an elderly lady with lifted eyebrows, sitting all alone, persuade her rapidly that he was her soul-mate and other flattering words, and borrow at least part of the money of which he stood in such dire need? That was an idea. That was almost an inspira—— No, it wasn't, from the fact that he was fair. All the gigolos that he had seen at various cabarets were black, as black as one's hat, and mostly Argentine, with motion-picture faces, with all their brains in their feet. No. He must think of something else.

And so he took his growing headache under the archway and the little tunnel into the Rue de Castiglione, that shattering, busy street hard by the Rue de Rivoli, which was even more shattering. Here he found himself, as one always does, among men who were very anxious indeed to get rid of large supplies of *The New York Times* and *Daily Mirror*, various Parisian papers, and packets of things in dirty envelopes which they smuggled into view.

Here, too, were the easily recognizable tourists, strange in every way, with blobs of rubber on their heels, who belonged to the hatless brigade. Here were the gentlemen who called themselves guides, who oozed out from shadowy places with the warmest of invitations to see those corners of Paris of which Parisians are ashamed—the sore spots in the lovely city, especially manufactured for the tourist mind. And here almost immediately he was clapped on the back by a cordial creature who said, " By Jove, it is you! Well, here's a bit of luck."

He was English, and Liverpool, which was easy to detect. Also, and better still, he was very well dressed. In fact, he wore the affluent air of an extremely wealthy manufacturer in Paris without his wife. Clinging to hope by his eyelashes, Peter submitted all too willingly to a crushing hand-shake. He said to himself with excitement: " He knows me. He's seen me in ' The Girl on the Motor-Bike ' or ' The

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"Darling, you must take this. Just a little sedative, dearie, which I understand is soothing to the tummy after a nasty go of the sea."

Powdered Lady.' I've made him laugh. He is the sail on the horizon. He is the thing you bail the boat with. He is my spar."

'Piper, old boy, how about wetting the throat? How about a Side-car or, if you want the local atmosphere, a gurgle of vermouth?"

To which Peter said, hanging his stick on his arm, "Old friend, this is the exact precise moment of the day when the spirits take a dip, that physical downward curve.

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A lubricator of sorts is the only thing to cure the feeling ; I'm your man."

The affluent, affable person, who must have been sent by Fate, took the little man's arm and both their lives in his hand and adventured across the street. And, having dodged death with success, led Peter through the swing doors into the nearest American Bar, where they sat on two high seats. A man with the face of a prize-fighter functioned swiftly, and through the first burst of badinage four Side-cars were consumed. They were very much needed by Peter, and did the trick at once. The more so because here obviously was not only a generous person, but one who owed him something for having been made to laugh, and laughter is good for the soul. It is true to say that under these conditions and circumstances anxiety rose from the little man's brain and floated away like a mist. He told himself that a hundred pounds in good French notes would make a blob in his pocket and that he could return to the nuptial chamber and face his bride with confidence and vim. To-morrow or the next day, having confessed his predicament to this excellent friend, he would be able, as luck was with him, to extract a further hundred or so, because this man had a heart and was rich. " Obviously gold," he said to himself. " Look at his diamond pin and his clothes from Savile Row. Then, too, he wears the right tie." And that, to an Englishman, is almost everything.

There they sat for an hour, and the number of their Side-cars would have made a traffic jam. So much so that something rather curious had begun to take place in Peter's well-oiled knees. Like his darling Popsy-Wopsy, he was a dancer too. Finally, having arrived at that subtle moment at which a touch can be made—and well he knew it, from the fact that he was an actor who had been so frequently touched—he turned to his providential companion and laid his hand on his knee. " Old bird," he said, " do a little thing for me, will you ? "

" Anything in the world, old cheese."

" The banks are closed, I understand, and I stand in need of brass. In other words, lend me a hundred quid until twelve o'clock to-morrow or so. It would help me not a little, what ? "

Then a weird thing happened. By some extraordinary process of physical elimination, almost psychic, the big man disappeared. Whether he had passed alcoholically into another dimension, or whether he had gone off into mid-air by a process of combustion, Peter couldn't say. The fact, and it was a fact, remained, that he was wholly alone. There had been, without a doubt, the indication of an exit from the swing doors of that bar. The stool at his side, once heftily occupied, was empty now, and to make things worse Peter was faced with the utter impossibility of paying for the drinks. The poor soul hadn't a bean.

He gave the situation a moment, clinging to the hope that that rich and cordial manufacturer, obviously from Liverpool, would return and do the proper thing, and, even if he didn't part with the hundred, settle for the Side-cars and so dispel the gloom. But he waited and still he waited, and finding that the sail was merely a mirage he turned his face to the pugilist, the man behind the bar, and trembled in every limb. A thick ear or a black eye—they were the alternatives. And so, in as brave a voice as possible, he said : " Very awkward this. Ah—I find I've left my purse in my suite of rooms at the Continental ; in fact, the bridal suite. Shall I give you a chit for this ? "

There was a growl and there was also a glare. It was most uncomfortably apparent that the inhospitable bar-tender had met his sort before. An enormous fist was clenched.

Whereupon Peter slipped one of his gold links out of his cuff, flung it on the counter, and said, " Take it out of that. I'll buzz in for the balance some time in the morning." Tottering from the high stool he added, with a fairly good accent. " *Enchanté de vous revoir,*" and so out into the street before he could be kicked out by the man whose eyes had become a rather frightening red.

" Well," said Peter, aloud and with a deep sigh, " that's that. ' Cease every joy to glimmer in my mind, but leave—oh, leave the light of hope behind ; what though my wingéd hours of bliss have been, like angel visits, few and far between.' " He knew the poets, this man, and, being one who suffered from insomnia, read in bed.

AMONG the jostling crowd of the city in which he could have lost himself, perhaps for ever, had he been reckless enough to wander away from the huge shadow of his hotel, Peter felt awfully small, frightfully impotent, and like a pet canary which had flown away from its cage. It is true that he gave the bar as wide a berth as he dared, and that he even made so bold as to go to the top of the street, from which, when the traffic parted for a moment, he could see the gardens of the Louvre. In these, sarcastically enough, there were innocent and eager children surrounding a permanent cubby-hole in which Punch, his greatest rival in the art of raising laughter, went through his noisy tricks with a bored and patient dog

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He pretended that his stick was a billiard cue in order that he might make a cannon with their glasses.

Toby looking at the crowd. In which, too, love pursued its way on benches, and to the imaginative eye the figure of Cupid could be seen running about with bow and arrow mischievously shooting darts—often with a very bad aim—too often, alas! Amidst the crowd, the hum, the shock of men, Peter was alone filled with the grim pain that goes with the solitude of passing his own door without a welcome. And there was a moment when he was tempted to throw himself under a really big car and let life and this ghastly crisis squash him flat. At that very instant, however, as though to rebuke him for his cowardice, he spied the well-known figure of a London theatrical agent on the other side of the street. He was strolling past the expensive shops over which the Continental went some distance into the sky. Every thought of extinction, of a final exit, left Peter at that sight. So welcome and so home-like, and so peculiarly apt. Without as much as a glance from right to left he dashed across the street, ignoring the screeching of brakes and the blasphemy, which sounds so very much riper when spoken in French, of irate taximen. One of the angels appointed to look after bridegrooms must have saved his life.

"Lockett!" he shouted, with the remains of his wind. "Lockett, my dear old egg!"

Having once been on the stage himself, though never able to act, Percy Lockett was in the habit of herding in his professional capacity with actors, and had memorized their tricks. Wherefore his registration of joyful surprise was recognizable. "Hallo-Hallo-Hallo!" he cried, throwing up his hands. "'Pon my Jimmy, what are *you* doing here?"

Peter gave his hat a tilt, touched his tie

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with a loving finger, and walked all round his stick. " Honeymoon, old horse. Just dashed over the pond. Qualmy, I give you my word. System needed. Mind over matter stuff. ' Blow wind, swell billow, and swim bark ! The storm is up and all is on the hazard.' "

HE was happy again. His spirits had gone up like a cork from a bottle of shimmy. In his old friend Lockett, to whom, before he became a star, he had paid many fees for engagements, was the needed patch of blue sky in that mass of cloud.

After a burst of " shop " as to what were going to follow the present pieces at the Gaiety, His Majesty's, the Duke of York's, and the Shaftesbury, which of the riotously successful American musical plays were to be brought to London, and who was the leading lady chosen, at last, for that adaptation from the French which had been granted a licence by the Lord Chamberlain after the English author had scrupulously removed everything that had made it worth his while to adapt, and worth the public's while to see, Peter drew up short and backed his friend into the doorway of a barber's shop. Sticks were sold there and hats, and other useful things. " English was spoken and American understood."

" Percy, old friend," he said, with a touch of emotion, " the sight of you now saved my life and my reputation—not that the latter would have meant anything to me —ha ! ha ! if the former had been taken away."

" Oh ! " replied Lockett. " How's that ? " He looked at his watch with the expression that invariably comes into a man's face when he sees the well-known advance guard of a borrowing party.

A keenly observant and sensitive person, Peter saw that look, and so he rushed to the point. " Old man," he said, " I've had the most terrible accident that's ever happened to any human being—especially one who stands on the threshold of his married life." His voice sank to tragic depths—there was a tremble on his lips. " I've lost the pocket-book in which I carried every cent I own. I want you to lend me a hundred quid to carry me on until I can write to London and get an advance on my next salary in ' The Girl Next Door.' I'll give you an IOU and pay interest at the rate of ten per cent.——"

A hand fell on his back, a large and hearty hand. And at the moment of its impact there was a roar of mirth. Overcome by excruciating amusement, Lockett availed himself of the crowd, in which, safely behind a little Frenchman with a quaint arrangement of beard, he waved his hand, shouted above the barn-yard noises of the traffic, " I always said you were the funniest man on earth," and disappeared. Obviously this was his way of saying that he had made a resolution never to lend again.

Peter dropped his stick.

And with it, that reliable and irresistible prop, without which he never was seen either on or off the stage, went his last hope, his final spot of courage. He was done, beat, finished. " Mafiche," he said. " The end." He took his stick from a polite boy, raised his hat, stared about him for a moment in utter despair, turned into the archway of the Continental from which he and his darling Pansy were quite quickly to be chucked, groped his way through the fog of humiliation to the staircase, and plodded up to the fourth floor with shaking legs. Only one thing was certain among the kaleidoscopic vista of his uncertainties. He must confess his ghastly carelessness to poor little Popsy-Wops as soon as she woke up.

He found that the door of the bedroom was open. And as he crossed the floor of his far too palatial sitting-room, filled with amazement and anxiety because by all the laws of medicine Pansy ought to have been very completely " out "—unless he had given her bismuth by mistake—he saw that she was sitting up in bed using her lipstick with her capable little hand.

He tottered in, and as he did so something fat and bulgy hit him in the face.

" Your dose worked like a charm, old dear," she sang out. " I feel as fit as a fiddle. Cut downstairs and buy a couple of pews for the show. And, by the way, there's your jolly old pocket-book. You gave it to me to carry after you'd paid the cab. Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tar."

He didn't believe it. He couldn't believe it. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, it *was* his pocket-book.

" Right-o, right-o, old darling," he said, falling over a pin. " Two seats for the Moulin Rouge. Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tar."

But as he did one of his best and most mirth-provoking exits into the sitting-room through what appeared to be a blinding glare of sun, tears of gratitude—hot tears—trickled down his nose.

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DRAWN FROM LIFE?

Famous Characters in Modern Fiction and How They Were Conceived

Does the author invariably work from the human model? Were "Mr. Polly," "Peter Jackson," "Quinney," and the rest drawn from life, or are they composite portraits? A number of eminent authors have been good enough to answer these questions in relation to their own favourite, or most popular, characters.

H. G. WELLS AND "MR. POLLY."

THE Editor of THE STRAND MAGAZINE has asked me how I came to write "Mr. Polly." I have scarcely given that story a thought for some years. I find it quite interesting to turn over its pages and repeat the Editor's question.

So far as I can remember now, Mr. Polly was begotten of a fit of indigestion. Imaginative writers are a weakly tribe physiologically speaking. We are only beginning to realize how much their moods, their exaltations and depressions, are due to erratic secretions and juices misapplied. They are apt to eat, drink, and take exercise inadvertently. In Mr. Bennett's delightful "A Great Man," you will remember how often that popular genius was taken unawares by his own refreshments. It is the nature of writers to be preoccupied and not know what is being handed to them. Afterwards, too late for comfort, they reflect. What other men turn into good resolutions they make into edifying stories. At any rate, Mr. Polly began in some such fashion. He was to be a man entirely guided, diverted, and driven by his outraged and indignant juices. He was to begin dyspeptic, fly from the meal to come, and end happily in eupeptic philosophizing.

MR. H. G. WELLS.

But in those days I was a very serious writer. All my early novels were novels with a purpose. I was incapable of that detached presentation of ideas and social forces I have achieved in "The World of William Clissold" and "Meanwhile." I had been born and brought up among fine-minded and sensitive individuals; my brothers, my school friends, and I realized we were abominably educated for the world we had to face: not even taught to speak our own language, undertrained physically and mentally, and thrust into employment without hope or pride. I saw their lives being crippled and their hopes mocked, and only by the most desperate efforts did I escape the same frustrations. I told these facts in a series of novels, "Kipps," "The Wheels of Chance," and "Polly" among others, which were received by more fortunate people as works of the most delightful humour. Their skins were too thick for the barbs I mingled freely with the fun. But Polly, by virtue of his sensitive digestion, I made a rebel, who did at last most desperately scramble out of

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intolerable conditions. He was able to get at some of the literature which should be the heritage of every Englishman, though his efforts to talk English were marred by strange pronunciations, and his sense of natural beauty lived and flowered in spite of circumstance. If he is not drawn from life he is compounded from life. He is myself, he is my dear elder brother, he is various others, and he is a very typical Englishman. Kipps and Polly, in their sensitiveness, diffidence, want of push, willingness, friendliness, latent romanticism are very English. I drew them in the conditions of restriction that were best known to me. Had I begun writing from a different level of social experience they would still have been as English as they are, but Polly might have been a Prime Minister and Kipps a king.

MR. W. W. JACOBS.

W. W. JACOBS AND "THE NIGHT WATCHMAN."

I REALLY don't know rightly about the characters in my books, or how they developed. Most of them, I suppose, are composite portraits, more or less, of sailormen I have met. I imagine the Night Watchman learnt a lot from me, and in so doing suffered a lamentable deterioration of character.

GILBERT FRANKAU AND "PETER JACKSON."

A HUNDRED years ago, in 1912, to be accurate, I published a novel in verse, called "One of Us." The hero of that tale was a pre-war "knut," and his success overwhelming. My profits amounted to just under fifty pounds! Not needing to worry about profits in those days, I meditated another rhymed satirical novel—of which I never wrote more than the one stanza:—

This is the story of Peter James, of Peter James' Jam,
Whose posters' scroll,
From Pole to Pole,
From Putney to Annam,
Laud the true conserve (made from fruit); and deprecate the sham.

The hero of my second "pseudo Don Juan," you will observe, was to have been a business-man. My own business, however, decreed that he should never materialize—sending me, instead, on a voyage round the world, which lasted about eighteen months.

During that voyage, being young at the time, I kept a diary, mostly of my own sensations, which I still have—safely under lock and key. And possibly because the autobiographical novel was then in favour; possibly because a larger knowledge of the world taught me that the man who tells a tale in verse might just as well tell it in Sanskrit, I decided that the local colour in my world-diary, plus a few episodes and an imaginary character or so, would be worth "novelizing" in prose.

Being half a literary person and half a business-man at the time, I naturally thought of two heroes—one a poet and the other in commerce. The poet, of course (remember how young we all were in those days!), to predominate.

With my poet, indeed, I had no trouble. He developed automatically; and I named him "Francis Gordon," making him author of a novel in verse, which I entitled "The Nut Errant"—a title which had been discarded for "One of Us." But the average business-man (I was new to fiction then) proved less easy. And it was only halfway round the world (in Singapore, as it happened) that I noted in my diary: "What about 'Peter James'? One might call him some other name—say, Jackson. And put him in the cigar-business. After all, one is in the cigar-business—and one knows nothing about jam."

That entry in an old diary represents, I feel, the first "birth-pang" of my novel, "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant." And for anyone who studies the comparative non-success of all "sequels," it is a queer thought that "Peter Jackson," published in 1920,

MR. GILBERT FRANKAU.

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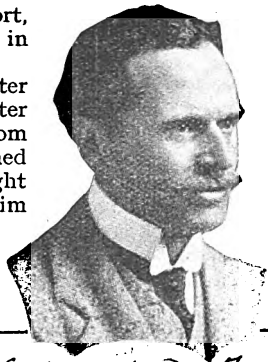
is actually a sequel to my first prose effort, "The Woman of the Horizon," published in 1917.

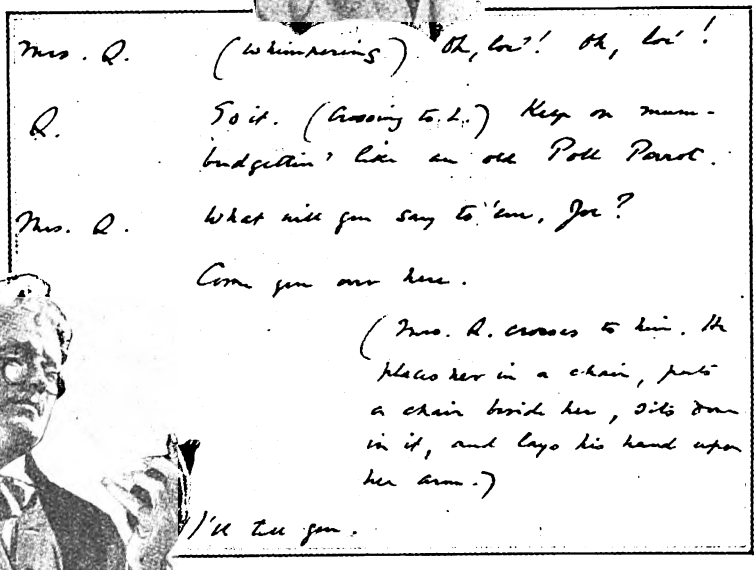
For in the novel of my world-tour Peter is only a subsidiary character. A quarter way through the book he vanishes from print. Yet, curiously, he never vanished from my memory. He stuck there, right up to the outbreak of war; and with him a problem, also to be found in that diary: "Can the average unromantic English business-man and his average, slightly cold-blooded wife be made sufficiently interesting as hero and heroine of a novel?"

That question—I believe—was answered in the affirmative by the years 1914–1918.



MR. H. A. VACHELL.

after short story, comedy, and book had been written, Joe went on growing through a series of short stories, published in book form as "Quinney's Adventures." His most



Mrs. Q. (whimpering) Oh, Joe! Oh, Joe!

Q. So it. (Crossing to L.) Keep a mum-budgetin', like an old Poll Parrot.

Mrs. Q. What will you say to 'em, Joe?

Come you over here.

(Mrs. Q. crosses to him. He places her in a chair, puts a chair beside her, sits down in it, and lays his hand upon her arm.)

I'll tell you.

A facsimile of the manuscript of a portion of the last act of "Quinney's."

"QUINNEY,"
drawn by Mr. John Campbell.

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL AND "QUINNEY."

JOE QUINNEY, from the moment when I first had a glimpse of him in a short story published in THE STRAND MAGAZINE, under the caption "The Lacquer Cabinet," growed and growed much as Topsy did. He began as a little man, a man of Wessex, till Henry Ainley added cubits to his stature. Long marked characteristic—love of the beautiful, hatred of "rubbish"—I took from Mr. Rohan, of Bournemouth, who so kindly gave me much enlightening information about the "tricks of the trade," but Joe himself might be termed "self-made." I do not think I could have understood Joe without the cordial assistance of his wife, Susan. I should not call him a composite photograph, although all the creatures of a novelist's imagination are, I suppose, in a sense "assembled," like the parts of a motor-car, from experience of our fellow-travellers. On the other hand, any *personality* seems gradually to form himself, and that is why I speak of Joe Quinney as "self-made."

Was Don Quixote drawn from life? Did Locke ever meet a Beloved Vagabond? All the oddities in fiction beloved by author and reader alike must have been

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"assembled." Possibly the inimitable "Mr. Polly" is an exception. He is a prime favourite of mine, because, somehow, I feel in my bones that he lived.* I had not that delightful conviction about Sam Weller. I have never attempted a portrait; I have never written a *roman à clef*. As a general rule, decency forbids; and it is doubtful whether famous men can be raised from the dead and made to live again. Which presentment of William of Orange can we accept as really true to life—Macaulay's or Miss Strickland's?

So far as Joe Quinney is concerned, I can only say that he took the bit between his teeth and bolted with me. I made no attempt to guide the self-willed little man; I followed him where fancy led him, giving him his head. If he got into trouble, I tried, it is true, to get him out of it.

Whether or not an author is wise to allow his characters (so-called) to assume control will remain an open question. The wind of inspiration blows where it listeth. Oddly enough, the public demands and acclaims *consistency*, but in real life how few of us are consistent? The great John Hunter is reported to have said: "Don't ask me what I thought yesterday; ask me what I think to-day." I should like to meet in fiction a character who was humanly inconsistent from the cradle to the grave, but it will be a brave man who presents such a hero to a hero-loving public. Micawber's strangle-hold upon our affections was his incapacity to practise what he preached.

IAN HAY AND "PIP."

"PIP" was my first book, and Pip himself my first hero. His prototype was a schoolboy of my acquaintance—my very intimate acquaintance, for I spent a long, laborious, but mutually profitable year trying to teach him something. I was the junior form-master at a famous Scottish Public School—just down from Cambridge, and full to the brim with educational zeal—while Pip occupied the least distinguished seat in the form in question. His name was not Pip, but we will call him that for the sake of simplicity.

He was an interesting personality, for he combined an extremely alert disposition with a brain which had never been taught to function at all. He could memorize a page of print in five minutes, but he was quite incapable of reproducing in his own words any sort of summary of its contents. All he could do was to start at the beginning and repeat the whole page by rote. He could no more condense than a gramophone.

"IAN HAY"
(Major J. H. Beith).

His early history-sheet gave the clue to the mystery. He had no mother; he was essentially an outdoor boy; and from childhood he had run wild about his father's estate. He had never read a story-book in his life; he had never had a fairy tale told him. "Jack the Giant Killer" and "Cinderella" and he were complete strangers. For the first fourteen years of his life his imagination had lain entirely fallow—an untilled field. His sole literary recreation was to study the cricket results—results only—in the newspaper. I once asked him what he did during the winter evenings in the holidays. "I tie flies," he said.

However, Pip possessed a most human and discerning housemaster, and he took the case in hand. Every evening after "prep" he set that docile but mystified youth down in a quiet corner of his study, and set him to read some elementary work of fiction, such as "Alice in Wonderland." Before going to bed Pip had to describe, in his own words, what the chapter which he had just been reading was all about. At first he made terribly heavy weather of it. For a long time he could only *quote*—almost word for word—but under continuous and benevolent pressure he acquired a mental digestive and reproductive system, and became almost a literary person.

But this severe course of intellectual gymnastics did not affect his physical condition. He was by nature a natural fast bowler of extraordinary promise. He achieved a place in the school eleven at an early age, and performed several memorable feats therein. I shall never forget a sporting wager which I once made with him, on the occasion of our annual match against the members of another school, our chief friends and rivals. Like all bowlers, Pip would have sold his soul to shine as a batsman; and it was as a batsman that he backed himself on this occasion. Our gambling currency in the summer term was always the same—baskets of strawberries.

* See Mr. Wells's statement on this subject.—EDITOR.

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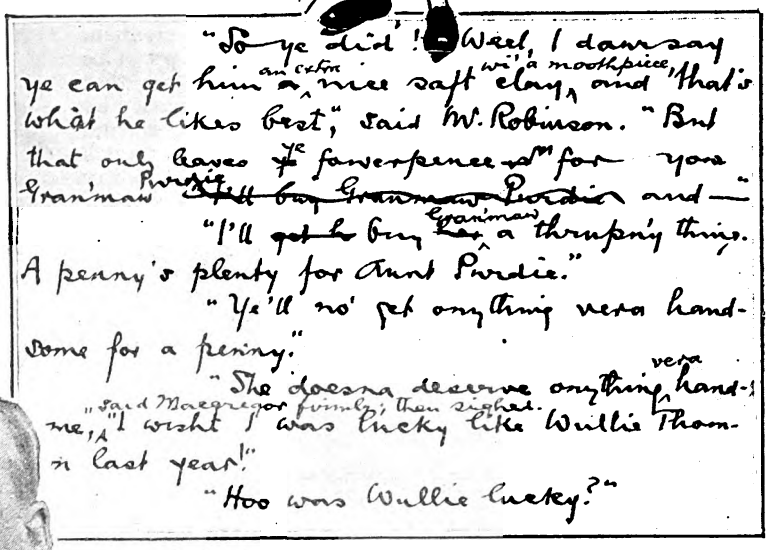
(They were fourpence a basket in those days.) Pip promised to give me a basket of strawberries for every run he made, if I would give him a basket for every wicket he took. I will draw a kindly veil over the details of the match, and merely state that when the match was all over I owed Pip fourteen baskets of strawberries. These were promptly delivered, and I was kindly invited to share the ensuing feast.

I believe Pip is managing a railway in India now. I have not seen him for nearly thirty years. But if his eyes should fall upon these somewhat impertinent reminiscences, I hope—in fact, I know—that he will forgive me. And I ask him to accept my grateful thanks for starting me on the first step up the ladder of authorship.

"WEE MACGREEGOR," drawn by Mr. John Hassall, R.I.



"So ye did! Weel, I dawsay ye can get him an extra nice saft wi' a moothpiece, clay, and 'that's what he likes best," said Mr. Robinson. "But that only leaves ye fowerpence for you Gran'maw Pwidie ~~I'll buy Granmaw Pwidie~~ and—"

"I'll ~~get he~~ buy Gran'maw a thrupn'y thing. A penny's plenty for Aunt Pwidie."

"Ye'll no' get onything vera handsome for a penny."

"She doesna deserve onything vera handsome," said Macgregor firmly; then sighed. "I wisht I was lucky like Wullie Thomson last year!"

"Hoo was Wullie lucky?"

A facsimile of a portion of the original manuscript of "Wee Macgreegor."

MR. J. J. BELL.

J. J. BELL AND "WEE MACGREEGOR."

He was neither deliberately drawn nor casually sketched from life; he was not, even vaguely, autobiographical; nor was he—if the word may be rightly applied to a character having any pretence to humanity—invented; and "created" is much too grand a word to set along with so small a performance. So, since I am asked to account for his origin, I can only say that it was an accident. The earliest suggestion of him seems to have come in the sound of a name to which, long after I heard it, he got quite fortuitously attached. And I say this because, had the name been any other than what it was, there would not, I feel certain, have been, later on, a character to carry it far.

This was how it chanced. Years before I wrote the first sketch—years, in fact, before I tried to write anything at all—for I am not, alas, of the true-born writing geniuses who have preferred fountain-pens to their feeding-bottles—I was voyaging to the Isle of Arran, on Glasgow's great annual holiday, "Fair Saturday." Jammed in a crowd, I heard a distracted woman, a mother of many, exclaim: "Macgreegor, ye wee rascal, tak' yer paw's haun'!" I did not see the child addressed; did not want to see him; but the sound of the name, so unusual as a "front name," even in Scotland, induced more smiles than mine.

At the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901, looking, one evening, at a case of

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jewels, I could not avoid being interested in the audible comments, half-humorous, half-pathetic, of a young working man and his wife. At that period it was part of my business, each Friday, to fill a column in *The Glasgow Evening Times*, and for the approaching Friday I made a slight sketch which touched lightly on the incident at the case of jewels. I thought so little of it that I preserved no copy, and I mention it now merely because it has, in its way, to do with the origin of "W. M."

Some weeks later, being fairly at a loss for a subject for my next Friday's contribution—I distinctly remember prowling about my father's library in search of an idea—I bethought myself—goodness knows why—of the young working man and his wife. Presently I had them doing their afternoon's shopping in Argyle Street.

Let me make it clear that my whole regard was primarily for the young working man and his wife. Why I should have presented them with a troublesome little son, as well as an infant daughter, is a question to which I have found no satisfactory answer. Possibly my artistic sense was equal to that of the celebrated Old Party of Ewell, who subsisted entirely on Gruel, but, to make it more nice, inserted some Mice . . . At all events, I must then and there have perceived in the situation, not the hour and the man, but the name and the boy. The label had been waiting for years; the boy blew in—and stuck to it—and behold, a character!

COMPTON MACKENZIE AND "SYLVIA SCARLETT."

SYLVIA SCARLETT is an imaginary portrait, although of course the lives and characters of various women of my acquaintance have been drawn upon to make her credible. I assume that she is a credible figure because I have received so many letters from women who have assured me that she might have been drawn from themselves. She was created in the beginning out of nothing, merely to supply a dramatic scene in "Sinister Street"; but she interested me curiously, in the same way as I might have been interested by a casual encounter with a woman of whose life and character I wanted to know more. When in October, 1917, I came home from Greece, tired and ill, I had to improvise a book which could be written at top speed during the few weeks of leave that I had. Probably some unconscious recollection of Stevenson's unwritten book, "Sophia Scarlett," was the cause of her name. I remember what a good omen it seemed that I should sit down to write about her on St. Sylvia's Day, November 3rd, 1917.

Looking back on her now, I realize that Sylvia was in advance of her time. The reviews, with a few notable exceptions, were more unsympathetic and uncomprehending than any I had hitherto received. It is really only now that she is beginning to seem an intelligible creation. Perhaps the trouble was that I had reached by 1917 a mental condition which the vast majority of people did not reach for another five years. So Sylvia Scarlett taught me one valuable lesson, which was that it would be ridiculous for me to think of writing anything about the War for a long time to come. I have said that, though Sylvia herself was an imaginary portrait, I had drawn from the lives of various women of my acquaintance the details of her biography, and the more fantastic and improbable readers may think some of these details the more positively can they be sure that such details are taken from what is called real life. During the war I acquired an immense treasure of hard facts about human nature, and "Sylvia Scarlett" was the first book in which I set out rather recklessly to spend some of this accumulated treasure. I am hoping that when all that treasure of hard facts about human nature has been spent the creation of Sylvia Scarlett will be justified.

MR. COMPTON MACKENZIE.

From all this it may be gathered that I consider her my most vital contribution to modern letters.

DENIS MACKAIL AND "GREENERY STREET."

I WROTE "Greenery Street"—or perhaps it would be truer to say that Greenery Street chose me as its amanuensis—just after I had been turned out of it myself, and in consequence with a considerable feeling of resentment against the place. My idea was to expose its treachery, to warn other people

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against its deceptive character, and, generally speaking, to let it know that although it had triumphed over me and driven me away, it needn't count on my remaining silent about this outrage so long as I had a typewriter with which to defend myself. I proposed to show the world that no mere collection of houses—however happy I might have been in one of them—should ever have the last word with a man of letters.

How completely unsuccessful I was in this attempt will be obvious to anyone who has ever read the work in question—or even to those who have only studied its reviews. The Street took entire charge of the story from the very beginning, and not only represented itself in a benevolent and romantic light to which it has no shadow of claim, but wouldn't even let me put myself in—as my original intention had been—in the *rôle* of the hero. No; Ian Foster was undoubtedly meant to be Denis Mackail when the book started, and Felicity was meant to be his wife. But it never came off. Important differences appeared almost on the first page, and as the divergence swiftly increased it became clear that the Street was determined to have its own way—as, I am now bound to admit, it always does.

Ian became an insurance broker (about whose work I know less than nothing), and Felicity developed a sister (which my wife doesn't possess). Nor could I induce them to imitate any of the episodes in which I had once taken part, or even to adopt those of my former friends and neighbours. Aided and abetted by that obstinate little street, they simply strolled away on a plot and adventures of their own.

It is quite possible that by taking this line they saved me from a number of libel actions, and it is a fact that I ended up by becoming extremely attached to them both.

MR. DENIS MACKAIL.

But if we were ever to be introduced to each other, if they were ever to try and crow over my failure to write about myself, I think I could pretty soon take the wind out of their sails. "No, my dear Ian," I should say. "No, my dear and very sweet Felicity; it's perfectly true that I didn't write that book—or at any rate in the sense in which I have written others; but if you imagine for a moment that *you* wrote it, then you are just as far out. It was Greenery Street itself which dictated to me during all those first months of exile, and even if—as I imagine—you happen to be the kind of people that it likes best, it is to Greenery Street that you owe your very existence."

That, I can't help thinking, would open their young eyes a little. But as the meeting will never take place, I shall never have the chance of being so cruel.

E. TEMPLE THURSTON AND "THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE."

THE characters in "The City of Beautiful Nonsense," with the exception of Jill, the heroine, were all taken from life. I do not know how an author can work convincingly without a model any more than an artist who paints a subject picture. If I may offer a criticism of my own work, I feel that the character of Jill suffers considerably on this account. She is spectral and unreal. I tried to correct this when I wrote my sequel, "The World of Wonderful Reality," but apparently the public had already made a character of Jill for themselves—one of those generous acts which an indulgent public is always ready to perform, and they resented the fact that I had pursued her nebulosity to its inevitable issue.

With the same amount of diffidence as a man will admit who wears a respirator and still adheres to the old-fashioned night-shirt, I must confess that at the time that "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" was written I was John Grey. Possibly I am still John Grey. One only catches glimpses of oneself, and the older one gets, the less one feels inclined to lose. All of the incidents concerned with the pawnshop and the journeys to Kensington Gardens are facts. There was very little except the progress of the story in that book which was invented. Every story, of course, has to be constructed and cannot rigidly adhere to any facts in life. For life itself seldom composes a story, just as Nature seldom composes a landscape. But the intermediate details, the secondary characters, and the spirit of the book itself are usually transcripts from the actual, and in their entirety represent the mood of the author at the time.

Mrs. Meakin's shop in Fenton Lane was transposed from a memory to the actual place where I was living when I wrote the book. If it is of any interest to readers, the address was 12^, Great Queen Street, where I was living in two rooms over a tobacconist s

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shop. The inhabitants of the second and third floors were the actual people who lived there—the theatre cleaner and the plumber's wife—who shared the water-tap on the stairs with me. Mrs. Rouse was the actual name of the lady who came to look after my rooms and made my cup of coffee in the morning. And the clarinet player came every Friday.

Payne and Welcome still pursue their pawnbroking business farther up the street and the little brass man is now in the possession of Miss Rosine Filippi, to whom the book was dedicated.

As for the old people in Venice, they were the mother and father of Miss Constance Fletcher, the authoress who dramatized "The Light That Failed" for Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson. I had met them in Venice, at the Palazzo Capello, about three years before I wrote the book. Although I did not know it at the time, their deaths occurred much as I described them in the book.

MR. TEMPLE THURSTON.

BERTRAM ATKEY AND "NELSON RODNEY DRAKE CHIDDENHAM."

THE origin of the idea of our young friend Nelson as a fiction character is a little obscure, but I imagine that he must be a boy who is living his early life precisely as I should have liked to live mine—but, for a thousand reasons, did not. This seems to indicate that Nelson is the materialization (in story form and a little idealized) of my own youthful dreams and desires for things which I could by no means have or do. It is quite certain that if, as a boy, I had read about Nelson I should have copied him in every possible way I could, and it is equally certain that to-day I quite wholeheartedly envy the lad his daily life. I cannot conceive a happier stage and state of life than Nelson Chiddenham's.

The foregoing is of course from my personal point of view.

From the point of view of myself regarded as a party engaged in the business of authorship I can state with precision that Nelson as a "character" has been flitting about in my mind like a dust speck in sunshine, or, as that has rather an odour of self-esteem, let us say like a bat in a belfry, for many years. He entered said belfry as a stealing, intangible desire to write a few stories about a boy who, like most boys, was instinctively prone to take some trouble to avoid the Eye of Authority—not because of a guilty conscience, but, again like most boys, because he subconsciously mistrusted the ability of Authority to deal with him and his personal and private concerns with sympathy, understanding, and justice.

In his desire to avoid the Eye of Authority this imaginary boy as he first occurred to me had devised a means of departure from and approach to his home which intrigued me considerably. The drive-way leading to his house being, to his mind, unsatisfactorily public, he had ingeniously tunnelled for himself a species of run or alley-way along the centre of a huge old yew hedge, very thick, which encircled the gardens. He had contrived to keep it secret. By this fascinating tunnel or hedge-burrow he could come and go unseen—though he had no real reason whatever for keeping so very carefully under cover, except the sufficient reason that he was a plain human boy.

That was how he first occurred to me. I liked the idea of him and his private hedge-run, and years ago mentally filed him for future reference—as authors do file such characters. The mental note about him would probably be something as follows.

"Remember—stories—boy who likes to lie doggo—nice boy—passion sport—stick up for pals—dogs—private alley in hedge—guns—roughish time brother—sisters—nag—father understands him—mother too—happy—busy—simple—loyal little devil—consume own smoke—so on."

Chance ordained that certain other of the bats in my belfry should be for a time more sellable than Nelson—until a day came when I was very weary indeed of the other bats and said to myself (authors talk a great deal to themselves—a bad sign, we are told) "Have a change—write about English boy—nice lad—competent—quiet—that lad with the private hedge."

So I drew Nelson forth from the belfry. And all the other jostling, uneasy shapes and shadows retreated into the recesses of what, for lack of a better and even more humorous name, I continue to call my "mind"—refiling themselves for reference.

Nelson, of course, is no one particular boy. He is not drawn from life as it is lived by any individual boy of my acquaintance—indeed, in a way, he is the most composite character I have ever invented. But he is just exactly the sort of boy I

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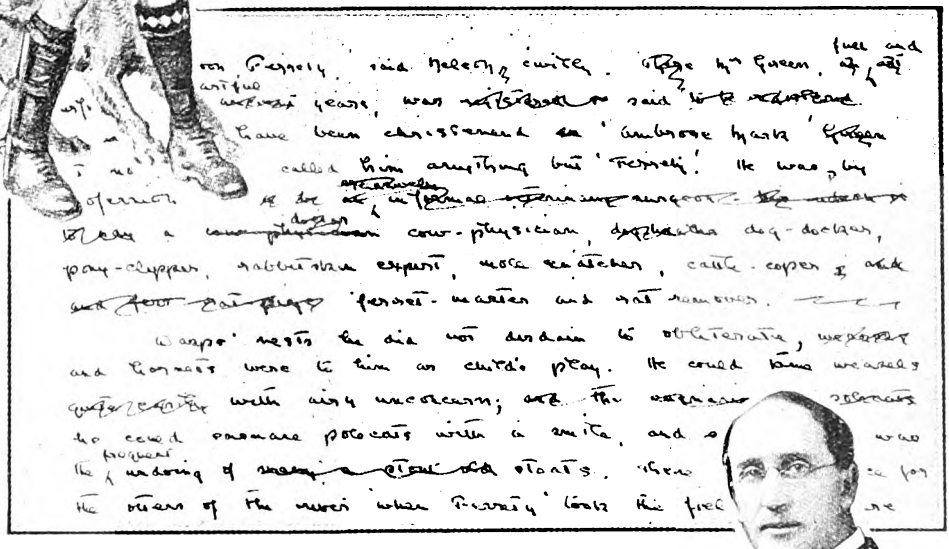
"NELSON CHIDDENHAM," drawn by Mr. C. E. Brock, R.I.

him be. Nelson's mother—well, one doesn't criticize mothers like Nelson's. At least, I don't.

I confess that I have written about characters which have seemed popular, but whom I, personally, would cheerfully take out and drown. But this is not the case with Nelson. As far as I can make him so he is too natural, too straight, kindly, polite, patient, courageous, and, in his mute English way, too sporting a lad ever to fail to appeal quite poignantly to me. He is the "reallest" character I have ever written about. But, then, rather obviously I may be biased in his favour.

Nelson's dog is drawn from life—most compositely—mainly from some of the dogs that have helped us run our home—for example, a setter, a cocker or two, some springer spaniels, an Airedale, and an Alsatian. Incidentally, I wish they were



A facsimile of a portion of the manuscript of a Nelson Chiddenham story.

should have liked for my own son. I like to believe that there is in Nelson Chiddenham a bit of Everyboy—and almost every man—I have known. Perhaps the simplest way to put it is that, in my opinion, Nelson is the son that most fathers have got—if they will let him be. He is my personal notion of what almost every boy would be—given the same opportunities—and Nelson's father, to me, is Everyman as in his secret heart he would wish to be to his son if Life and himself would let

MR. BERTRAM ATKEY.

as good and well-behaved as Nelson's dog—my days would be longer in the land.

Queerly enough, for some unknown reason I have never introduced that most attractive hedge-run into the stories. That puzzles me. Maybe it is saving itself up.

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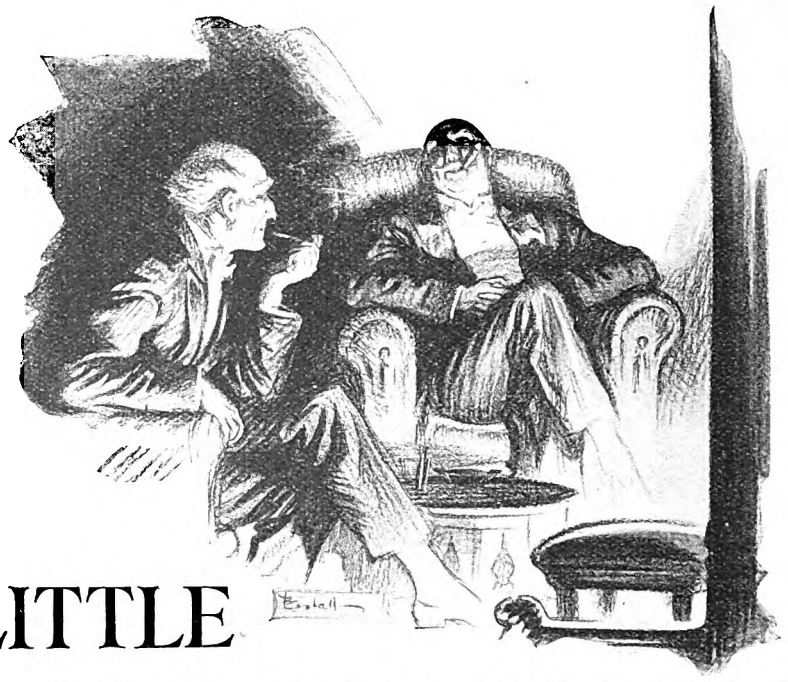

LITTLE THINGS THAT PUZZLE

By HENRY E. DUDENEY

PROFESSOR WORPLESTON, of Cambridge, was spending Christmas with his old friend Mr. Forrester at the latter's country house. They were old college chums, and though they had chosen very different careers and each had become somewhat distinguished in his own line, Worpleston as a Professor of Mathematics at his university and Forrester as a promising man at the Bar, they retained many tastes in common. Thus they were both fond of music and chess and frequently corresponded over mathematical puzzles. The conversation between them on Christmas Eve is perhaps worth preserving, because, although it was quite desultory, it happens to contain suggestions for interesting lines of thought. The Professor had lit his pipe and Forrester taken a cigar, and both were comfortably settled before a blazing log fire.

"I notice," said the Professor, "that you are sitting with your hands clasped together (the fingers interlaced) and that the right thumb is on the top. Now you will see that when I clasp my hands in the same way the left thumb is uppermost. It is curious that we always link our hands in the same way and that the way to which we happen to be non-accustomed seems awkward and wrong. Why is this? How does it happen that in our early days we select one way or the other and stick to it for the rest of our lives?"

WHY THE DONKEY STARVED.

"It is quite impossible to say," said Forrester. "It seems to be one of those things that just happen. It is always occurring in life that when a man has the choice between two things that appear to be quite equal he selects one but could not possibly give the reason why. You will remember the old story of the donkey which was placed in a field between two bundles of hay equidistant and equally attractive, and as he was unable to decide on which to approach he remained where he was and starved.

WHY WE KEEP TO THE RIGHT.

"For generations," continued Forrester, "it has been the custom for pedestrians to keep to the right, but certain municipalities and others have recently introduced the stupid order that you must keep to the left. The result is confusion between those who are aware of the order and those who keep to the old tradition."

"I quite agree," said the Professor, "but do you know why men have always walked to the right? It arose from the fact that our ancestors found it convenient for defence with the sword if approached by an adversary. For the same reason we always in riding keep to the left, because you can then defend yourself without reaching across the horse."

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"And I believe," said Forrester, "that it is for the same reason that people in a restaurant will generally select a seat in a corner or against a wall, so that the enemy may not attack them in the back. It is curious how a long-acquired habit will persist. People will continue to lick the nasty gum when putting on a postage-stamp when it is just as easy to apply their tongue to the corner of the clean envelope.

"Then," added Forrester, "people are always leaving things in the train because they will put them in the rack above their heads. If it would only occur to them to put them in the rack opposite they would be before their eyes and less likely to be stolen or left behind. And I am reminded of those people who are perpetually saying: 'I have brought my umbrella because if I leave it at home it is sure to rain.'"

"The fact is," said the Professor, "that they have good reasons to remember the few occasions on which they were caught, but they overlook the hundreds of instances in which they carried their umbrella unnecessarily."

WHAT IS A COINCIDENCE?

"That reminds me," said Forrester, "of coincidences. When perplexed by some happening some people seem to be satisfied by the explanation, 'It was a mere coincidence.'

"Which, as you will say, is not always quite satisfying. Let me give you two instances that have come under my own knowledge and which are absolutely true. First, a cyclist was thrown over the handlebar of his machine and he fell forward in the mud. On rising he found that one of his fingers had run into a finger ring. Secondly, a lady when feeding the swans in the moat round the Bishop's Palace at Wells threw a valuable ring into the water. Attempts to find it failed, but some time later two boys were discussing the depth of the water and one said he could touch the bottom with his stick. He thrust it into the mud, and when it came up it had on it that valuable ring. These, as I have said, are true stories and you may call them coincidences, but in each case the chances are so small that they lie quite outside the theory of probabilities

THEORY OF PROBABILITIES.

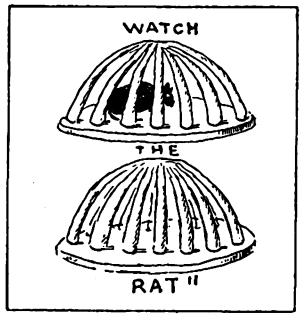
"Speaking of probabilities," said Forrester, "a man asked me this the other day. If he threw a penny and it came down head five times in succession, what are the chances as to the sixth throw? I told him that, of course, the chances were equal and that the result could not be affected by what had gone before, assuming that a penny is always equally likely to fall either way."

"True," explained the Professor, "and yet you must always remember that the theory of probabilities only applies if you take an infinite number of cases—that the more cases we take the more correct it will be. I think everybody would wisely call 'tail' because the fall of six heads or six tails in succession will not frequently occur."

"Changing the subject" said Forrester, "have you noticed how many people are deficient in observation—that is, they see over and over again, so to speak, without observing. I have found that, for example, very few people can tell me without looking at the coin on which side of a halfpenny is to be found the date. Their answer, if correct, is probably a mere guess. And if you ask them to draw a clock face with Roman numerals from memory they will invariably put IV instead of IIII."

HOW IS THE RAT MOVED?

"Of course, IIII is put that way to prevent its confusion with VI," said the Professor, "but people are sometimes equally slow in detecting what you would think is so obvious in a little puzzle or trick. For example, I have here a little puzzle that was sold in America some years ago, but which I have never seen produced here.



"You will see when I hold up the card to you that it represents two traps, one containing a black rat. Now watch. Hey, presto! You see the rat has disappeared from the upper trap and is now in the lower one. Hey, presto! It has gone back to the upper trap. Can you see how it is done?"

Forrester spotted the answer quickly and said it was very amusing. The trap is, of course, drawn on one card and the rat on another behind it. How is it worked?

A HOUSE OF CARDS BURGLED.

"It reminds me of this very simple puzzle that will perplex children," said Forrester.

He took a pack of cards and extracted three knaves, which he said represented burglars, and the King of Clubs, which stood for the policeman.

"One burglar enters this house by the roof," and he placed a knave on the top of the pack. "The second burglar enters by one of the upper windows." and he pushed a card into the middle of the pack. "The third burglar went in at the basement," placing a card at the bottom of the pack. "Then the policeman went after the last man," and he placed the King of Clubs also at the bottom. "Now," he said, "cut the pack where you like and you will find the policeman has caught all three knaves."

They examined the pack after cutting and found that the King and three knaves were together. The Professor laughed, and it is hardly necessary to say that he at once saw the trick.

"I once actually perplexed a little party gathered round the fire by holding a pack of cards above my head and undertaking to name each card in succession after they had been shuffled. Of course, I saw them all in the mirror over the mantlepiece, but nobody detected it."

A COIN TRICK.

"That reminds me," said Forrester, "of an impudent little trick of my own. I once placed six pennies on a table and gave one of them to my audience to examine carefully and make any marks they liked to identify it. After it had gone the round of the company I threw it into the hat and swept the other five in also, and then with a handkerchief on the top dived my hand beneath and brought out the marked penny at the first trial."

The Professor stated at once how it was done. Perhaps the reader can guess with equal rapidity.

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VERY MENTAL ARITHMETIC.

"Another old trick," said the Professor, "that will astonish the children is this. I write down a row of figures—say, 4 7 8 6 5—and ask them to add a second row. I then add five more figures. They again add five, and then I write in the last row and ask them to add up the addition sum. When they have done this I astonish them by telling them that they will find the answer on the back of the paper, which I had previously written there."

"Yes, it often perplexes people," said Forrester, who was acquainted with the trick.

A BILLIARDS PUZZLE.

"Speaking of puzzles," said Forrester, "reminds me of this little one, asked me the other day over the billiard table. On a board twelve feet long and six feet wide, if a ball is placed against the bottom cushion seven inches from the corner, how should it be hit so that it will come back to the starting point after hitting each of the other three cushions?"

"Yes, it is, of course, very easy," said Worpleston, "but I will give you on another occasion some other puzzles on the billiard table that are not quite so obvious."

HOW SHE KNEW.

"There is an amusing story," said Forrester, "going the round at present in various forms. A man went into a teashop and ordered a cup of China tea and a few slices of bread and butter. He added, 'And don't bring me any cream, please.' The girl went off, leaving him wondering whether he had not met a man seated at another table. When the waitress returned he asked her if she was sure it was China tea, and she said it was. 'But I asked you not to bring me cream.' She apologized and took it away, but when he received the bill the cream was charged for. She again made her excuses and struck it out. A few minutes later the man slipped twopence under his plate and left. As he departed the girl turned to a fellow-waitress and said, 'I do love these sailor boys!' Now, how did she know that he was a sailor?"

The Professor gave the answer at once and they both laughed heartily at the absurdity of the thing. Yet some people are actually perplexed.

HOW TO HOLD AN EEL.

"I was amused the other day," said the Professor, "by watching a fishmonger in his shop trying to transfer a number of live eels from one pail of water to another. But every time he made an attempt to hold an eel the thing slipped from his fingers. As I stood and laughed the man said reproachfully: 'It's not so easy as you think, governor.' I was very surprised that a man in the trade should not know how to hold an eel, as I knew as a boy when I used to go spearing eels in the 'rhines' on a large Somersetshire moor. I showed him how to do it, and he appeared to be very grateful to me for the tip."

Forrester declared that he did not know how, so the Professor explained it to him.

A MATCH TRICK.

"HAVE you made any new puzzles lately?" asked Forrester.

"Only this little thing," replied the Professor. "This I made an hour ago. Here is a box of matches pulled open with only about twelve matches in it. You will see that no head is visible. The heads are all at the other end of the box. Now you will see that when I close the box and give it a shake I can turn round one of the matches."

He then opened the box again and certainly the head of one of the matches (which was unbroken and unbent) was now visible while all the other heads were out of sight. Forrester had to give the little trick a few moments' thought, but he hit on the answer.

(The solutions to the eight puzzles or tricks which are not answered in the above article will appear in our next issue, together with a new set of "Perplexities").

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

932.—A WILY CHESS PUZZLE.

1. P — B 7, 1. K takes Kt; 2. P — B 8 (recovering the same Kt), checkmate!

933.—A CLOCK PUZZLE.

To be at right-angles the minute-hand must always be exactly fifteen minutes either behind or ahead of the hour-hand. Each case would happen eleven times in the twelve hours, *i.e.*, every 1 hour $5\frac{5}{11}$ minutes. Starting from nine o'clock the eighth addition will give the case 5 hrs. $43\frac{7}{11}$ mins. In the other case, starting from three o'clock, the second addition gives 5 hrs. $10\frac{10}{11}$ mins. These are the two cases between five and six and the latter will, of course, be the sooner.

934.—ANOTHER SOLITAIRE PUZZLE.

REMOVE No. 1 and play as follows: 3 – 1, 10 – 2, 8 – 10, 1 – 9, 10 – 8, 7 – 9, 12 – – 8, 21 – – 9, 25 – 11, 27 – 25, 24 – 26, 22 – 24, 33 – – 23, 13 – – 25, 32 – – – – – – – – 10, 31 – – – – – 1. The dashes indicate the number of balls that have been removed in a jump.

935.—A CHICKEN PUZZLE.

THEY must have had 300 chickens with feed enough to last 60 days. Then 300 × 60 gives 18,000 as the number of individual daily chicken meals. If they had sold 75 chickens, then the feed would have lasted the remaining 225 chickens for 80 days. Whereas if they bought 100 extra chickens the stock would feed 400 for 45 days.

936.—HEARD ON THE RACECOURSE.

THIS is a charade of the free type that finds favour with a good many.

A NECK—SPURT.
(AN EXPERT.)

924.—EXPRESSING 24.

I HAVE received from Mr. G. P. Easten the following simple solution for three 7's.

$$\left| 7 - \sqrt{\frac{7}{\cdot 7}} \right|$$

And from this I obtain the answer for three 1's by substituting 1 for 7 in every case and putting plus instead of minus. The puzzle is thus solved with all the nine digits.

Several other readers sent the solution later.

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THE HIDDEN WITNESS

By "SAPPER" (H. C. McNEILE)

Illustrated by J. DEWAR MILLS

I DON'T know exactly when it was that I first realized that Miles Blandish was in love with Mary Somerville. As a general rule men are very unobservant on such matters, and I suppose I was no exception. All I know is that when I mentioned the matter guardedly to Phyllis Dankerton she observed, brightly, that the next great discovery I should make was that the earth was round. So I suppose it must have been fairly obvious.

Anyway, it doesn't much matter, except that I'd like to get it accurate. The house party was all there when I arrived. To take them in order there were, first of all, our host and hostess—John Somerville and his wife. He was a wealthy man—something in cotton—who had reached such a position of affluence at a comparatively early age that he could, had he wanted to, have given up business altogether. But he preferred to have something to do, and now, at the age of forty-five, he still went up to London five days a week. A smallish man, thin and spare, with shrewd, thoughtful eyes that missed very little that went on around him.

It was through Mary, his wife, that I had got to know him. She was fifteen years his junior, and if ever there was a case of wondering why two people had got married, this was it. She was one of the most lovely creatures I have ever seen—the sort of girl who could have married literally anyone she chose. And then quite suddenly five years ago she had married John.

Personally, I have always thought that money had a good deal to do with it. Not that John wasn't quite a decent fellow, but having said that you'd said all. By no possible stretch of imagination could he be regarded as the sort of man to inspire romance in a girl's heart. He was far too self-centred, far too much the business man to the exclusion of everything else. And yet Mary, with numerous men at her feet, had selected him.

My own impression was that she had begun to regret it. They got on very well together, but it was a very restrained relationship. She liked him, and he was inordinately proud of her—and that was the end of it. So much for our host and hostess.

There was a married couple—Peter Dankerton and his wife. She was a bridge fiend, with the tongue of an adder, but distinctly good-looking and very amusing company.

The younger element consisted of Tony Merrick, a subaltern in the Gunners, and a jolly little kid called Marjorie Stanway, who spent most of their time practising new steps in the hall to a gramophone.

And finally, there was a man called Miles Blandish, who was the only one I had never met before. He was a planter of sorts out in the F. M. S. About thirty years old, he seemed to have been everywhere and done everything. He had rather a lazy, pleasant voice, and a trick of raising his eyebrows when he spoke that made the most ordinary remark seem amusing; and little Marjorie, to the fury of young Merrick, adored him openly. In fact, he was the outstanding personality of the party, Mary always excepted.

She introduced me to him as soon as I arrived.

"The only one you don't know, Bill," she said. "Miles—this is Bill Canford, who is almost a fixture about the house."

"A very pleasant occupation," he remarked, lightly, and I got the impression that his eyes were very observant. "If I could afford to become a fixture, I should choose an English country house to do it in."

We talked on casually for a while, and he was certainly a most interesting man.

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And an efficient one. His knowledge, obviously acquired on the spot, of rubber and its future showed him as a man who could observe and think for himself.

"And where," I said, after a while, "is our worthy host?"

"My dear Bill," laughed Mary, looking up from the tea table, "John has got a new toy. His present secretary's face is so frightful that he can't bear her in the same room with him. So he has got a sort of phonograph machine—a super-dictaphone, I think he calls it—and he dictates his letters into it. You don't have to talk into a trumpet like you do with most of them. It stands in a corner, and looks just like an ordinary box. Then she comes and takes off the records and writes down what he has said."

"It might almost have been worth while to change his secretary," said Blandish, lazily. "Still, he is doubtless very happy."

He leant over to light her cigarette, and I was struck by the atmosphere of physical fitness that seemed to radiate from the man: hard as nails; without an ounce of superfluous flesh on him. In fact, a pretty tough customer in a rough house.

I SUPPOSE a woman would have spotted the lie of the land that night after dinner. In the light of subsequent events I now realize that the tension was already there, though I didn't get it personally. It was just a little thing—a casual scrap of conversation between two rubbers. Blandish was shuffling the cards, and Phyllis Dankerton, who had been his partner, made some remark about the excellence of his bridge not having been impaired by his living in the back of beyond.

He grinned and said: "We're not all savages, Mrs. Dankerton. Even though there aren't any Ten Commandments, and a man can raise a thirst."

"At the moment," remarked John Somerville, quietly, "we don't happen to be East of Suez."

The faintest of smiles flickered for an instant round Phyllis Dankerton's lips. Then——

"How marvellously Kipling gets human nature, doesn't he?" she murmured. "You and I, Bill—and an original no-trumper of mine is open to the gravest suspicion."

Yes, the tension had begun. To what extent it had grown I don't know; but it was there. As I say, I realized that afterwards. John Somerville suspected his wife and Blandish. Not that he said anything, or even hinted at anything that night, with the exception of that one remark. As always, he was the courteous, perfect host—at least, so it seemed to me. Though when, a couple of days later, I was discussing things with Phyllis Dankerton, she regarded me pityingly when I said so.

"My dear man," she said, "you must be partially wanting. There is an atmosphere in this house you could cut with a knife. Our worthy John is watching those two as a cat watches a mouse. It's all excessively amusing."

"Do you think Mary is in love with Blandish?" I said.

"Wasn't it Maugham who said in one of his plays that a lot of unnecessary fuss is made about the word 'love'? Quite obviously she is immensely attracted by him—who wouldn't be? I'm crazy about him myself. And my dear Bill, I might be eighty-one with false teeth, for all the notice he takes of me. It's cruel hard on a deserving girl. There's poor old Peter, who wouldn't notice the Alps unless they were covered with Stock Exchange quotations, and yet I throw myself at that brute's head in vain."

"I wonder how Mary met him," I said.

"Really, Bill," she cried, impatiently, "you're intolerably dull to-day. She met him in the same way that everybody does meet people, presumably. Anyway, what does it matter? The beginning has nothing to do with it. It's the end that interests me."

"You really think that it's serious?" I said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"With a woman like Mary, you never know. I don't believe she would ever have a real affair with a man if she was still living in her husband's house. But she's quite capable of bolting for good and all if she loved the man sufficiently. Cheer up, Bill"—she laughed—"it's not your palaver. By the look on your face Mary might be *your* wife."

"I'm very fond of Mary," I said, stiffly. "We've known one another since we were kids."

And at that moment young Merrick came in and the conversation dropped. But I couldn't get it out of my mind. That there should be even the bare possibility of Mary running away with another man seemed to knock the bottom out of my universe. And soon I found myself watching them, too, and trying to gauge the state of the affair. Was Mary in love with him? That was the question I asked myself a dozen times a day. That he should be in love with her was only natural. But was the converse true? I studied her expression when she didn't know I was looking at her, and I had to admit that there was a change. For a few moments, perhaps, she would sit sunk in her thoughts, and then she would make an effort to pull herself together and

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Blandish grinned and said: "We're not all savages in the back of beyond."

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be laughing and bright as she always used to be. But it was forced, and I knew it; she couldn't deceive me. And sometimes when she came out of her reverie, if Blandish was in the room, her eyes would rest on him for a second, as if she was trying to find the answer to some unspoken question.

Then I started to watch him. But there wasn't much to be got from Miles Blandish's face. Years of poker playing had turned it into an expressionless mask when he wished to make it so. But I managed to catch him unawares once or twice. After lunch one day, for instance. He was holding a match for her cigarette, and over the flame their eyes had met. And in his was a look of such concentrated love and passion as I have never seen before. Then, in an instant it was gone, and he made some commonplace remark. But to me it seemed as if the truth had been proclaimed through a megaphone.

And another time it was even more obvious. Without thinking I went into the billiard-room, and they were alone there. They were standing very close together by the fireplace talking earnestly, and as I opened the door they moved apart quickly. In fact, it was so obvious that I almost committed the appalling solecism of apologizing for intruding. Blandish picked up a paper; Mary smiled and said, "Why don't you two men have a game?" But once again the truth had been shouted to high Heaven: these two were in love with one another. What was going to be the end of it? Was Mary going to bolt with him, or would the whole thing die a natural death when he went out East again?

I believe it might have been the latter, had John Somerville not brought matters to a head. It was after dinner, on the same day that I had surprised them in the billiard-room.

"By the way, Blandish," he said, as we were beginning to form up for bridge, "when are you going back again?"

"I haven't quite decided yet," said Blandish, lighting a cigarette. "Not for some little while, I think."

"Want to pay a round of visits, I suppose, and see all your friends. I've just remembered, my dear"—he turned to his wife—"Henry Longstaffe is very anxious to come for a few days, as soon as we can put him up. He and I have a rather considerable business deal to discuss."

I glanced at Phyllis Dankerton: a smile was hovering on her lips; I glanced at Miles Blandish: his face was expressionless; I glanced at Mary: she was staring at her husband. All three of them knew, as I knew, that there was no spare room in the house. If Henry Longstaffe came to stay, somebody had to go.

"I'm afraid I shall have to fold up my tent and fade away very soon," said Blandish, easily. "Would the day after to-morrow do for Mr. Longstaffe, or would you sooner he came to-morrow?"

"The day after to-morrow will do perfectly," said Somerville. "Sorry you can't stay longer."

And then we sat down to bridge in an atmosphere, as Phyllis Dankerton afterwards described it, which would have frozen a furnace. Nothing more, of course, was said—but words were unnecessary. The gloves were off, and everyone knew it. Miles Blandish had been kicked out of the house as blatantly as if he had been shown the door. Moreover, it had been done in the presence of all of us, which made the matter worse.

"I THINK John is a fool," said Phyllis Dankerton to me, just before we went to bed. "And a vulgar fool at that. One doesn't do that sort of thing in front of other people. If I were Mary I'd give him such a telling off as he would never forget."

"He's an extremely angry man," I remarked, "and that accounts for it."

"Then it oughtn't to," she retorted. "It simply isn't done. To have said it to him privately would have been a very different matter. And you mark my words, Bill, unless I'm much mistaken, friend John will have achieved the exact opposite to what he intended. He has simply forced their hands."

"You think she'll run away with him?" I said.

"I think she is far more likely to now than she was before. And if she does John will be very largely to blame. To-morrow is going to be the crucial day, while he is in London. The great decision will be made then."

She gave a little bitter laugh and her eyes were very sad.

"God! what fools women are," she said, under her breath. "What damned fools!"

Then she went to bed, leaving me to a final night-cap. And when I had followed her example, and lay tossing and turning, unable to sleep, there was one picture I couldn't get out of my mind. It was the picture of Mary and Miles Blandish together, leaning over the stern of an East-bound liner. And at last they turned and looked at one another, as man and woman look at one another when they love. Then they went below.

I must get the events of the next day straight in my mind. Phyllis Dankerton was right: it was the crucial day. But somehow

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or other things seem a little blurred in my head. I'm not quite certain of the order in which they happened.

First of all there came the interview between Mary and Miles Blandish. I overheard part of it—deliberately. They were in the billiard-room once more, and I happened to stroll past the little window at one end of the room, which is high up in the wall. It was open, and I could hear what they said distinctly, though they couldn't see me.

" My dear," Blandish was saying, " it's a big decision that will alter your life completely and irrevocably. It's a decision that cannot be come to lightly. Divorce and that sort of thing seem a comparatively small matter when applied to other people. But when it's applied to oneself it doesn't seem quite so small. Wait, my darling, wait. Let me have my say first. You are going to be the one who has to make the big sacrifice. It's not going to affect me ; it never does affect the man. And in my case even less so than usual. My home is out East. It doesn't matter the snap of a finger what I do. But with you it's different. You're giving up all this ; you're running away with a man who is considerably poorer than your husband. You are coming to a strange life, amid strange surroundings—a life you may not like. But a life which, if you do leave your husband, you will have to stick to."

YES ; he put it very fairly, did Miles Blandish. There was no trace of pleading or emotion in his voice ; he seemed to be at pains to keep everything matter-of-fact. And because of that the force of the appeal was doubled.

" We are neither of us children, Mary." The quiet, measured words went on. " We know enough to disregard catch phrases like the world being well lost for love. It isn't, and nobody but a fool would think it was. And if you come with me it won't be—it will be changed, that's all. But it's going to be a big change : that's what I want you to get into your head."

And then, at last, Mary spoke.

" I realize that it's going to be a big change, Miles. Do you really think that matters ? I realize that life out there will be different from this. Do you really think I care ? My dear, it's not any material alteration in surroundings that has made me hesitate—it's been something far more important and fundamental. I'm not going to mince words ; you attracted me from the first time we met. But my great problem was—was it only attraction ? If so, I'd have been a fool to go. It is a big decision, as you say—an irrevocable one, and to take it because of a passing whim would be folly. Last night—when John said what he did to you—I knew with absolute certainty. Every single instinct and thought of mine ranged themselves on your side. I've never loved John ; now I positively dislike him."

" That's not quite enough, Mary," said Blandish, gravely. " I don't want you to come with me because you dislike John. I want you to come with me because you love me."

" Miles—my darling."

I scarcely heard the words, so softly were they spoken. And then came silence. In my mind I could see them there staring into one another's eyes, staring down the unknown path that they were to take together. A little blindly I turned and walked away. The matter was decided, the choice had been made. For good or ill, Mary was going with Miles Blandish.

" Bill, what is the matter with you ? Are you ill ? "

With an effort I pulled myself together ; Phyllis Dankerton was looking at me with amazement on her face.

" Not a bit," I answered. " Why should I be ? "

" My dear man," she said, brightly, " I am partially responsible for Peter's tummy, but I hold no brief for yours. I don't know why you should be ill, but you certainly look it. By the way, I saw our two turtle-doves making tracks for the billiard-room. I wonder if the momentous decision has yet been reached."

I said nothing. I felt I couldn't stand the worry any more. Phyllis Dankerton is all right in small doses, but there are times when she drives one positively insane. So I made some fatuous remark and left her, vaguely conscious that the surprised look had returned to her face. What the devil did it matter ? What did anything matter except that Mary was going with Miles Blandish ?

Nothing could alter that fact now ; they were neither of them the type of people who change their mind once it is made up. And at dinner that night I found myself watching them curiously. They were both more silent than usual, which was hardly to be wondered at. And John Somerville, who obviously had not yet been told, kept glancing from one to the other.

That he would be told, I felt sure. The idea of bolting on the sly would not appeal to either Mary or Blandish : they weren't that sort. But would it be done after dinner, or postponed to the following day ? Or would Blandish go in the ordinary course of events, leaving Mary to break the news to John ?

The point was settled after dinner. John

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the attitude of the two men told its own tale.

" Damn it—let's clear out," muttered Merrick. " Rather rotten, don't you think? Seems like spying on them. I'm going back to the house, anyway."

He strolled off, and then once again I riveted my eyes on the study window, on that grim, fierce, age-old struggle of two males for a female, the struggle that brings murder into the air.

And when ten minutes later I went into the drawing-room the atmosphere was not much better. Mary glanced up quickly as I came through the window, and her face fell when she saw who it was. Merrick made a grimace at me, and Phyllis Dankerton went on playing patience religiously. Even little Marjorie Stanway seemed to feel there was something the matter, and was fidgeting about the room.

THEN, suddenly, it happened. The door was flung open and Somerville's secretary dashed into the room. Her face was ashen white, and she was gasping for breath.

" Mrs. Somerville," she almost screamed, " he's dead. There's a knife in his back. He's been stabbed."

For a moment no one spoke. Then Dankerton said a little dazedly, " Who is dead ? "

" Mr. Somerville," sobbed the woman. " At his desk."

And again, for what seemed an eternity, there was silence. Mary, her face as white as a sheet, was staring at the secretary, as if she couldn't grasp what had happened. Young Merrick was saying " Good God ! " under his breath over and over again and watching me. And at last I heard a voice say, " We must get the police." It was my own.

" Don't you think that we ought to go and make certain ? " muttered Dankerton. " He may not be dead. Not the women, of course."

And then, at last, Mary spoke.

" Where is Miles ? "

It was hardly more than a whisper, but it sounded as if it had been shouted through a megaphone in the deathly silence. And at that moment he appeared in the window. For a second or two he stood there looking from one to the other of us : then he spoke.

" What on earth is the matter ? "

It was Dankerton who answered him.

" Somerville has been stabbed in the back," he said, gravely. " His secretary says he is dead. We were just going along to see."

" Stabbed in the back ! " cried Blandish, in amazement. " But whom by ? "

" We don't know," I said, and once again Merrick's eye met mine. " Let's go and see if there is anything to be done."

But there wasn't : that was obvious at the first glance. He lay there, huddled over his desk, his eyes glazed and staring. And thrust into his back up to the hilt was a knife I had often seen lying on the mantelpiece. For a long while no one spoke. Then Dankerton pulled himself together.

" Look here, you fellows, this is a pretty ghastly business. We must get the police at once. I'll tell the butler to ring up."

" Yes," agreed Blandish, quietly. " We must get the police."

His eyes were riveted on the knife. Then, with an effort, he turned and looked at us each in turn.

" He and I had a frightful row to-night." He spoke with intense deliberation, and once again Merrick looked at me. " A frightful row."

" My dear fellow," muttered Dankerton, awkwardly. " Look here, I'll see about the police."

He bustled out of the room, and suddenly Merrick took the bull by the horns.

" This is a pretty grim affair, Blandish. You see, Canford and I were outside there, and we saw you having words with—with him."

" Then you must have seen who did this," said Blandish, eagerly.

" Unfortunately, I didn't," said Merrick. " It seemed to me to be a private affair, and I went back to the drawing-room."

" And I followed shortly after," I remarked.

Once more silence fell, while Blandish stared at the dead man.

" I had a frightful row," he repeated, mechanically, " and then I went out into the garden through the window. Damn it," he exploded, suddenly, " you don't think I did it, do you ? "

" Of course not, my dear chap," I cried. " Of course not."

He walked a little stiffly out of the room, and I turned to Merrick.

" What's your opinion ? " I said, at length.

" What's yours ? " he answered. " Damn it, Canford—if he didn't do it, somebody else did. And if it was anybody in the garden we'd have seen him."

" We might not," I said. " If he was hiding."

" In the back, too," he muttered. " A dirty business. God ! I wish the police would come."

And in about half an hour they did. An inspector and a sergeant arrived, and with them the doctor. The cause of death was clear : the knife had penetrated the heart. Somerville had died instantaneously. Then

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came the turn of the police, and it soon became evident in what direction their suspicions lay. Blandish made no attempt to hide the fact of his quarrel with the dead man. It would have been futile in view of the fact that Merrick and I had seen it. But he flatly refused to say what it was about, and he denied absolutely that he was the man who had done it.

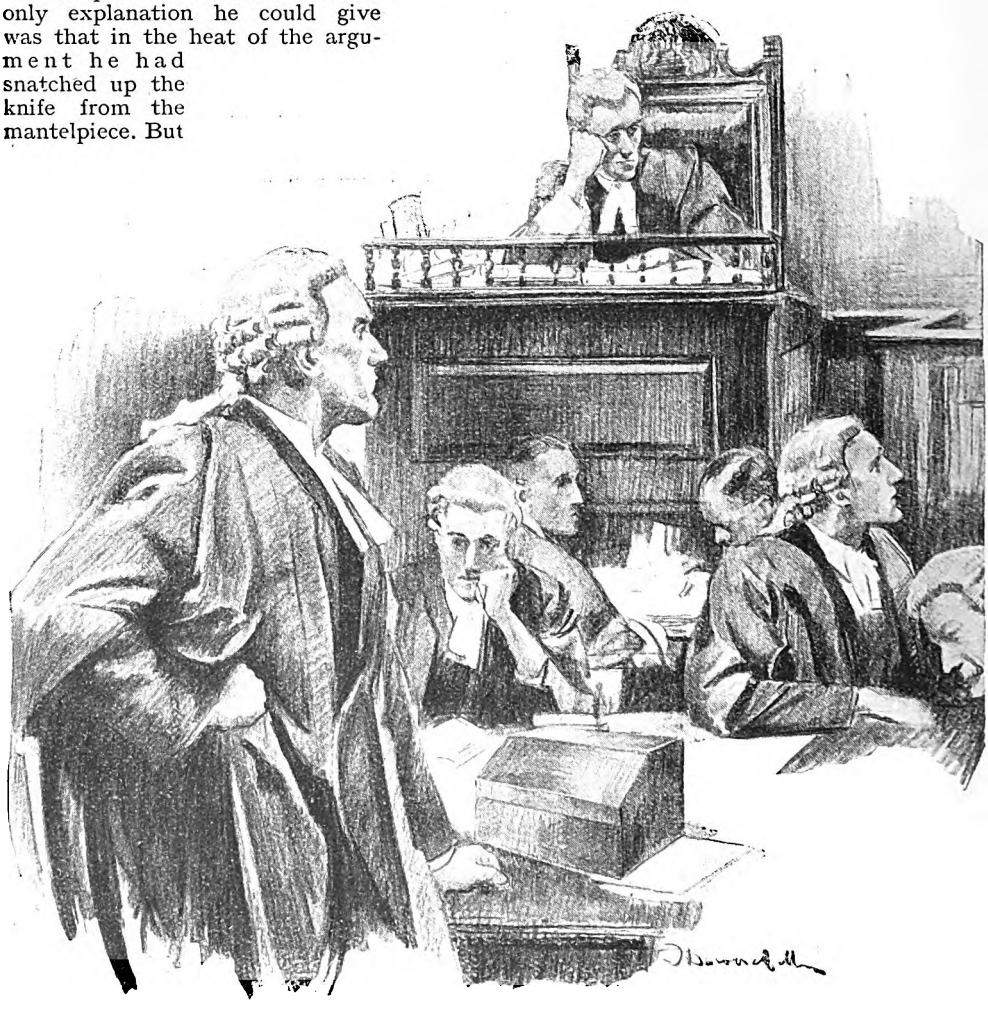
"Nobody said you were, sir," said the Inspector, sternly. "You go too fast."

"Rot," said Blandish, curtly. "I'm not a damned fool. If I have a violent row with a man, and a few minutes later he is found dead, there's no good telling me that suspicion doesn't fall on me. Of course it does."

And the next day suspicion became certainty. A finger-print expert arrived from Scotland Yard, and the marks of Blandish's fingers were found on the hilt of the knife. It was proof irrefutable, and the only explanation he could give was that in the heat of the argument he had snatched up the knife from the mantelpiece. But he still denied that it was he who had struck the blow.

"Then how comes it that yours are the *only* prints on the knife," said the Inspector, quietly.

I think the only person who believed in his innocence through the days that followed was Mary. To us it was painfully, terribly clear. As I said to Merrick the night before the trial, it was the most obvious case, short of having an eye-witness, that could be put before a jury. And he agreed. He and I, of course, were two of the principal witnesses for the prosecution, but our evidence was really unnecessary. Blandish had never denied the fact that he and the murdered man had had a bitter quarrel. And that



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box, forced her way into court and shouted out: "Wait! Wait! Don't go on!" Her face seemed vaguely familiar to me, and suddenly I placed her. She was John Somerville's secretary.

EVERYBODY was so astounded that she had reached Sir John before anyone could stop her. And by the time ushers and attendants had rushed up to her, she had said enough to Sir John to cause him to wave them away.

"My Lord," he said, "this woman has just made a most important statement to me. In spite of the irregularity of the proceedings I propose to put her in the witness-box."

And so Emily Turner was duly sworn, and made her statement. And when she had finished you could have heard a pin drop in the court.

"I understand," said the Judge, "that the position is as follows. The box in front of Sir John is the instrument which the murdered man used for dictating his letters into. This morning, not having thought of it since the night of the tragedy, you opened the box. And you found that a record had been made. You thereupon played that record, if that is the correct phrase, and you discovered that the conversation between prisoner at the bar and the murdered man was what was recorded. Is that correct?"

"Yes, my Lord."

And then came a harsh voice from the dock: "Smash the thing, I tell you. Smash it."

"Silence," said the Judge, sternly, and Miles Blandish faced him steadily.

"My Lord," he remarked, "I give you my solemn word of honour that my conversation with Somerville that night had nothing to do with it. Moreover, it affects a third person. Therefore need that record be given?"

"It must certainly be given," said the Judge. "If what this witness says is correct, a vital piece of evidence has just come to light. Turn on the machine."

I can still see that scene. Miles Blandish, impassive and erect; the jury tense and expectant; the public craning forward in their seats. And the centre of everything—that plain little woman bending over the box.

There came a faint scraping like a gramophone. Then it started.

"Sir, with reference to your last quotation, I beg to state——"

John Somerville's voice: God! it was uncanny. Things began to blur a bit before my eyes. John Somerville dictating a letter.

"May I have a few words with you, Somerville?"

A gasp ran through the court—instantly quelled. Miles Blandish has spoken. The living and the dead—reproduced before us.

"Certainly, Blandish."

"There is not much good beating about the bush, Somerville. Your wife and I are in love with one another."

"How excessively interesting."

How well I knew that cold, sneering tone of Somerville's. I could see now the slight rise of his upper lip. I could see the man himself again, as I hadn't seen him since that night—as I'd never expected to see him. He was dead, damn it! dead. And that cursed instrument had brought him to life again. What was he saying now?

"I certainly can't prevent my wife going away with you, Blandish. But it's going to be a little awkward for you both. Divorce proceedings bore me, and I hate being bored."

"You mean you won't divorce her, Somerville?"

"You damned swine. You utterly damned swine."

There came a pause, then Somerville's voice with fear in it.

"Put down that knife, you fool. Put down that knife."

I hadn't told them that: I'd kept that dark. I'd seen Blandish pick up the knife—seen it myself. Just as he said.

"And now clear out, blast you."

Somerville's voice again—icy, contemptuous. How I'd hated his voice, the thin-lipped swine. And it was then I remembered.

"Stop it!" I screamed. "Stop it!"

People stared at me in amazement, and suddenly I felt icy calm. The machine scraped on, then—"Hullo, Canford! What do you want? I'm busy."

Somerville's voice: he'd said it to me as I entered the room.

"What the devil—— Oh! my God!"

Followed a little sobbing grunt: then silence. The record was over.

Yes! I did it. I'd always loathed him, and I loathed Blandish worse. Because Mary loved Blandish, and I loved Mary. And when Blandish rushed out past me into the night I saw my chance to get them both. I wrapped a handkerchief round the hilt of the knife to prevent finger-prints: I'd thought of everything.

Everything except that cursed machine.

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The Wine

by J. J. BELL

Illustrated by
G. FITZGERALD

IN the quiet midnight secrecy of his library, Harlow, the man who had profited, was reading the letter, which he knew by heart, from Morton, the man who had paid. It was not a pleasing letter for a gentleman to have received, and Harlow had always passed for a gentleman in the eyes of other people, and in his own eyes also, possibly because his ideas of what constituted a gentleman were not extreme. He was now reading it for the last time, word by word, phrase by phrase, in his last hope of being able to assure himself that the sentences might mean a little less than they had hitherto appeared to signify.

This was Morton's message, which was written on a letter card, under a date, but no address :—

" For six months you have been putting me off with pittances, pretending to be a man with many responsibilities and difficulties. Now I have learned for certain that you are rich and flourishing, with none but yourself to consider. I do not know, nor do I care, whether I had a hand in the founding of your present fortune. But I do know that I am going to have half of it. Seven years ago I held my tongue and went to prison ; but I can still speak, and three words to the police would set them digging up the old ugly business. Had you not tried to trick me I should have been easy with you. Now my terms are fifty-fifty, with two thousand pounds on account.

" I hereby give you notice that I shall come to see you on Sunday night, or rather at one-thirty a.m. on Monday morning, so that your servants and neighbours may be safely in bed ; which I dare say you would prefer. Have the two thousand pounds ready in one-hundred-pound notes. I shall come, as before, through the garden, and shall expect to find the window unfastened. Failing that I shall come a little later to your front door, with a police officer.

" W. H. MORTON."

No ; it was not a pleasing letter, and at last Harlow was forced to conclude finally that it meant all that it said. In any case, the time—the clock on the mantel indicated one-ten—for speculation on the values of words was past. Getting up from the writing-table, he stepped over to the hearth, placed the letter on the coals, and watched it burn. His fair, rather overfed-looking, but normally amiable countenance was not then attractive. If there was determination—or stubbornness—on the compressed lips, there was fear in the furtive

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eyes. Veins showed purple on his pasty cheeks; on his forehead, under the thinning hair, the perspiration shone. But he had made up his mind; or, rather, he had consolidated his intentions, for his mind was as it had been on that morning, three days ago, within five minutes after his receipt of the letter. Then, as now, he had decided that he would give up nothing to Morton, and that Morton must go and trouble him no more. But it was only now, or so it seemed to him, that he had finally decided as to the manner of Morton's going. Nevertheless, he had been more or less deliberately planning and rehearsing the thing for three days—and nights.

Staring at the fire, he asked himself whether he had forgotten anything. No; he had foreseen and arranged for everything. What about the other letters from Morton? On the whole, it would be wise to keep them. They contained nothing more than appeals for money, or expressions of gratitude, and might be useful later.

Turning from the fire, he surveyed the long, spacious apartment, half library, half billiard-room, with all its equipments for creature comfort and luxury. It was typical of his pleasant bachelor home, symbolic of his easy, selfish existence. By Heaven, no! He was not going to give it up, nor any part of it! A malign anger replaced the fear in his eyes; a silent snarl appeared at his lips.

But the hour was at hand. He must act.

On a small table standing near to the desk was a tray containing a decanter of port, a glass, a plate of biscuits, and a crystal of hot-house grapes. He went over to it, and then seemed to hesitate, his finger and thumb in his vest-pocket. But his doubt, if such it were, soon passed, and he withdrew from the pocket a tiny screw of white paper, opened it with the utmost care, and let its contents, a mere pinch of a fine crystalline powder, slip into the wine-glass. He then poured in a very little wine, and dipping his finger therein rubbed it round the inside of the glass and across the lip. The glass now had the appearance of having been lately used. Wiping his finger carefully, he took a biscuit, broke it in two, laid one half beside the glass, and, presently, put the other in the fire.

Again he asked himself whether he had foreseen everything. Minutes slipped past.

The long hand of the clock was now close on the half-hour, and he seemed to realize the need for haste. Darting to the nearer window, he opened the heavy curtains, drew aside a screen, and peered out. The night was dark, but clear. In the garden nothing stirred. Suddenly he felt cold, and shivered. Quickly he undid the window fastening, raised the sash a couple of inches, stepped back, and drew the curtains together.

Taking a final look at the tray, he got an idea. At the desk he scribbled on a sheet of note-paper the words: "Wait for me," and placed it against the decanter. Yes; that would encourage Morton to help himself, not that Morton required encouragement where liquor was concerned. And Morton was something of a port connoisseur—or had been, before he went to jail. Port was certainly the lure for Morton, who would not boggle at a used glass. And even if Morton threw out the dregs, enough would be left adhering to——

Harlow pulled himself up, left the room, drew shut the door, and turned the key. Now he was panting a little. Leaning against the wall, he waited till, at long last, he heard the raising of the window sash.

Then stealthily he moved across the hall and bolted up the stair. His bedroom was directly above the library. Tearing off his clothes, he got into pyjamas and dressing-gown. Turning to the bed, he disordered a little the covers and the pillow. After that he lay down on the floor, with his ear to it, and waited, listening.

THE man Morton, having softly reclosed his way of entrance, stepped from between the curtains into the light, and blinked about him. For a moment or two you would have fancied he was suspicious of the room's emptiness. Then, with a shrug, he moved forward till he came to the writing-table, where he halted, gazing first at the things upon it, presently at the cheerful fire beyond. He rubbed his hands, not as one who is cold, but as one who anticipates.

He was not an ill-looking fellow. His glistening black eyes were perhaps over-alert, his oddly narrow lips too mobile. They suggested cuteness and glibness—and drink. A keen man would not have hesitated to distrust him. He was dressed cheaply rather than shabbily.

Now his gaze swung from the fire to the tray, and in an instant his hand was on Harlow's message. Again the gleam of suspicion. Once more the shrug—followed by the muttered words: "Harlow daren't play tricks now." He let the paper drop, and eyed the tray.

"Been having a refreshment on his own. So like him not to have a clean glass for a friend. But I'm not so particular as I once was."

He took up the decanter and removed the stopper. "Wonder if you're one of the old vintages—about the only things in the world worth their price," he murmured to

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the wine, as he poured it, in the careful way of a lover.

He charged the glass almost to the brim and, setting down the decanter, raised it and sniffed at the wine.

"By——!" He smiled. "You're *it!*"

Still smiling, he raised the glass higher, higher, until he held it against the light of the shaded bulb hanging above the writing-table.

His hand was fairly steady. "Here's to the future!" he said aloud, and stood gazing at the lovely, transparent ruby.

HARLOW'S whole frame gave a frightful jerk when, at last, the heavy thud came up to his ear; but he made no haste to rise. Perhaps he was aware that his limbs would not support him. While minutes passed he lay there, quaking and sweating.

Yet it was only the beginning, he reflected, and he must nerve himself to carry the thing through. There was more than a dead man to be faced before the night was gone.

Telling himself repeatedly that the worst was over, and wishing there had been a drink handy, he got up, and sat awhile, rehearsing, as it were, in his mind, the next act.

At last he felt able to proceed, and went downstairs, garbed as he was, that being part of the play. As quietly as he could—though there was no reason for caution now—he unlocked the library door. But it was some time ere he opened it, and longer ere, with ghastly wet face, he entered.

One glance, and he knew, at least, that Morton would trouble him no more, that his own smooth existence would continue.

Morton lay on the floor, near to the hearth, on his left side, almost on his face, his arms outstretched, the hands clenched. Not far from his right hand was the glass, its stem snapped. At his feet was Harlow's written message.

After a while Harlow, stepping softly, his eyes averted from the body, picked up the message and gave it to the friendly fire. Coming back, he took out the white paper that had contained the powder, and dropped it on the floor under the tray.

It was very still in the room.

Harlow went across and parted the curtains. Better to have the window open a little, to show how Morton had entered. When he had adjusted the sash, he left the library and crossed the hall to the dining-room. There he took brandy, a good deal of brandy. Soon he began to feel fitter, more confident.

There was a telephone extension to the library, but he went to the instrument in the rear of the hall.

Without delay he got the police station. After giving his name and address, he said:—

"A dreadful thing has happened here, officer. A few minutes ago I was awakened by a noise. On going downstairs I found, in the library, a man lying on the floor, dead. I recognized him as a poor chap whom I have tried to help more than once, but latterly have been compelled to refuse. He—he looks as though he had died suddenly. There is a wine-glass and a scrap of paper. I have disturbed nothing. Please send your men at once, and ask them to fetch along a doctor."

He answered a few brief questions and returned to the library. He was tempted to take more brandy, but was conscious that he had talked more than was absolutely necessary on the 'phone.

It seemed a lifetime till he heard the sound of the approaching motor, and then it seemed to have arrived before he was ready.

He opened the front door to a sergeant and a constable. The doctor would follow almost immediately. He had been out at an urgent case, but they had got in touch with him.

"I haven't wakened my housekeeper and the maids," said Harlow in the hall. "It would simply have meant hysterics."

The sergeant nodded approvingly, and looked about him inquiringly.

"Shall I tell you what little I can, sergeant?"

"Afterwards, if you please. Let us have a look at the man."

Harlow, fighting his reluctance, led the way into the library. In a whisper he said: "I haven't touched anything—or him—except to see if he was alive."

"How did he get in?"

"Must have been the window. I lock this door at night."

"You keep a good fire, Mr. Harlow."

"I—I was unusually late to-night. Hardly asleep when the sound wakened me."

"Well, I had better have a look at him."

"I hope," said Harlow, forcing the words, "that you won't have to tell me it was—self-destruction. He was not quite sane."

The sergeant, without answering, passed to the body and went down on his knees, bending low to get a glimpse of the face. Twenty seconds, perhaps, of silence, and then he sat up abruptly, saying sharply:—

"This man isn't dead!"

"That's so," said Morton, and got to his feet. "Hold him!" he cried, pointing.

But there was no need to hold Harlow, unless to give him the support that the constable gave.

"What's the meaning of all this?" the sergeant demanded. "If it's a joke——"

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He stopped short at the sight of the ghastly host.

"Let me explain," said Morton. "I came here to-night by appointment; and by arrangement I entered by the window, at one-thirty. Mr. Harlow and I had business to discuss, and he was not looking forward to it. When I got into the room, it was lighted, as you see it now, but he was not present. However, I found a note asking me to wait for him."

"Where is the note?" asked the sergeant.

"He burned it when he came in to make sure that I was dead. Well, I saw the wine on the table, and was thirsty. I treated myself to a glass——"

Harlow managed to speak, thickly.

"I had drunk from the same glass wine from the decanter just before——"

"One at a time," the sergeant interposed. "Go on—you." He nodded at Morton.

Morton went on. "As I was saying, I filled a glass. I smelled it, and it seemed good—so good that I fancied seeing the colour of it, and held it up to the light. Then, just when I was going to lower it to drink, I thought I saw little shining things slowly drifting down to the bottom of the glass. There's a magnifier on the desk. I used it. The little shining things were crystalline. I didn't like it. I didn't know what to think, but I was taking no chances. Also I wanted to get at the truth. I got up on a chair, jumped down as heavily as I could, stretched myself, lay still, and—waited. And as I lay still, I remembered that Harlow used to have an acquaintance named Locker, who was a research chemist. Harlow used to call upon him in his laboratory. I don't suppose he would hand out deadly poison to Harlow or anybody else; but once in his laboratory, one might help oneself when he was not looking. Anyway, afterwards, you had better ask Harlow if he has been to see Locker within the past three days——"

"It's a lie!" gasped Harlow.

The sergeant put up his hand. "I'd advise you both to be careful what you say. Anything you say——"

One glance, and Harlow knew that Morton would trouble him no more.

"I've nearly finished," said Morton. "I was getting tired of lying there, when he came in. My idea was to wait till he examined me, and then I'd know the truth and give him the fright of his life. But he avoided me. The only things he did were to burn the paper I told you of and to drop another paper, just a tiny bit—there it is, under——"

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'Lies, lies, all lies!" interrupted Harlow. He had got a grip of himself. His voice was stronger, steadier. "If there's poison anywhere it's a put-up thing. I'll prove to you that it was not in my wine. Constable, you might get me a glass—the sergeant will see to it that I don't run away—you'll find one in the room directly opposite."

The constable looked to the sergeant, who, after a moment, nodded.

Presently Harlow, glass in hand, went over to the tray. The three watched him,

the officers puzzled and impatient, and Morton staring as though in fascination.

'Now I'll show you!" Harlow lifted the decanter and charged the glass, returned the decanter to the tray, and stepped back a couple of paces. There was something theatrical in the way he threw up his head and raised the glass.

Somehow Morton obsessed, maybe, by his hate—had overlooked, or omitted to foresee, a certain eventuality. Now, as in a flash, he sensed the danger to—himself.

"Stop him!" he shouted, and made for Harlow. "Don't let him——"

The big arm of the sergeant went out—a barrier. But the sergeant said, with a snap, "Hold on, there! Better not drink——"

Harlow laughed wildly, and drank. He swallowed half the wine, then paused, a strange look on his face. Next moment his hand shot away from his mouth, and the glass spun across the room to be smashed against the wall. The bewildered look changed to an awful one; an inarticulate noise came from his gaping mouth; he stiffened horribly, was convulsed, stiffened again, and abruptly went lax in the constable's arms. The sergeant sprang forward.

"God! The man's dying!" he said in a hushed voice.

He was wrong. The man was dead. And the doctor, who came in a minute later, had no hesitation in diagnosing poison, though he would not then give it a name.

It was well for Morton in the days that followed that he had remembered about the acquaintance who was a chemist. For who would otherwise have believed him when he declared that, on an impulse, he had poured the untasted glass of wine back into the decanter?

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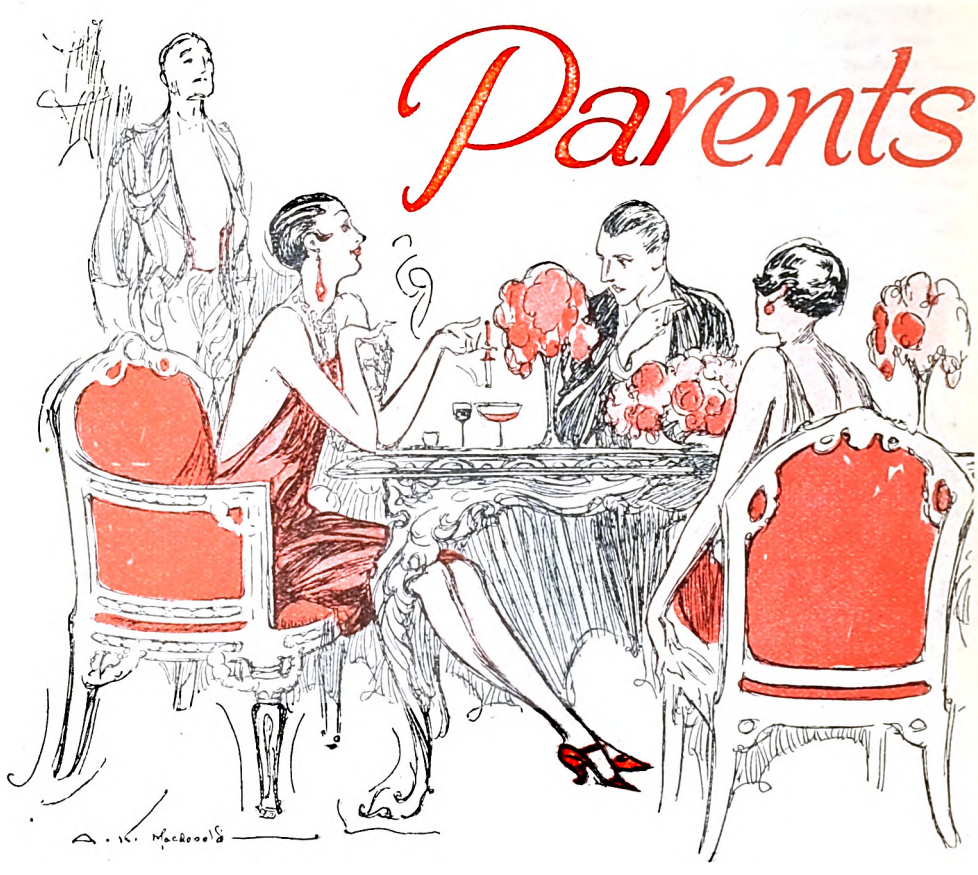
Parents



I.

"THERE is," thought Mr. William Sterling, with the razor-keen perception of a threefold millionaire, "no place like home."

He gazed contentedly round the lesser dining-room of his Berkeley Square house, the lesser dining-room on account of there being no company that evening. Behind every chair a footman in grey and cerise livery; the choicest morsels of fish, flesh, and fowl; elegant wines; the innocent faces of his children; the wife of his bosom.

"There is," thought Mr. Sterling again, "nothing like family life."

His eyes perceived the seven pearl necklaces of Mrs. Sterling, one for every day in the week. Friday's intrigued him most. The previous owner had been assassinated on account of those milky blobs. Friday is notoriously an unlucky day. No one, however, would assassinate Mrs. Sterling. She was far too modern to stand any nonsense.

Mr. Sterling cleared his throat and the beautiful smile of an indulgent father spread over his face as he addressed his son, aged twenty-one.

"Had a good day, Vere?"

"Pretty foul, thanks."

Smiling still more indulgently Mr. Sterling addressed his daughter, aged nineteen.

"Had a good day, April?"

"Absolutely rank."

April was Mr. Sterling's favourite. She went about the world with eyebrows slightly raised as though peeved with her own beauty, hair swept off her brow and waved into undulations that seemed almost solid so that not one hair strayed. She could, and did, wear a skimpy evening frock, having practically nothing underneath it, with the air of one thoroughly and opaquely dressed. It had cost Mr. Sterling a thousand a year in school fees alone to achieve these results.

His glance moved on to his wife, more slender, more elfin, more *élancée*, if possible, than her own daughter.

"And you, Helen?" he inquired.

"Rahly, William," Mrs. Sterling answered

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A. K. MACDONALD

from her baby rosebud of a mouth, "you make me tah'd."

"'Home, home, sweet, sweet home,'" ran Mr. Sterling's thoughts; "a place of rest, of natural candour, of no pretence. Still, it does one good to stir occasionally from the hearth." He went on aloud :—

"In that case, what I suggest is that we take our summer holiday at once."

Vere raised his smooth and shining head from its gloomy slant and demanded :—

"Whassorta holiday, fathah?"

"A pleasant and enjoyable few weeks, my boy, at Goldensands, at the Millionaires' Club."

Vere drooped his smooth and shining head once more.

"Migosh, not that! I simply can't. I promised George Urns to motor with him across the Gô Desert. He's invented a new kind of car."

April's eyebrows rose to the roots of her hair.

"Nothing doing. I've booked myself for an aeroplane trip to the Arctic with the Stenning-Brownes. I want to shoot a polar bear and eat blubber. Iris Stenning-Browne says it's better than caviare when you get used to it."

"I don't think either of you quite means that," Mr. Sterling said, tactfully. "I don't think either of you really wants to leave your mother and myself. I founded the Millionaires' Club on purpose to provide for the family holiday. It caters for every taste —two golf courses, a bathing-pool, tennis, fishing, motor-boating, polo, and dancing. One can dine in one's own cottage or at the restaurant. A cabaret direct from Paris gives two shows a night and all the best shops have small branches in the Marble Arcade. We meet our own kind of people there. After all, money whispers louder than blue blood, and I do think we millionaires should stick together. Don't you agree, Helen?"

Mrs. Sterling shrugged her massaged shoulders. One of her necklaces became entangled in her *sorbet à la reine de Saba*. A footman rescued it.

"I am just one seething mass of reaction from domesticity," she said, simply.

"What real objection," Mr. Sterling inquired, "has anyone to the Millionaires' Club?"

"The people are so dull!" exclaimed his children.

"Morgan Bond will be there, April."

"Oh—*him!*"

"There will be Diamond Throgmorton, Vere."

"Oh—*her!*"

Mr. Sterling, who was, above all things, a family man, preserved his good-humour.

"I will ask anyone in the world you like who will add to your enjoyment," he declared.

A subdued ripple of anticipation ran all over April's lithe figure.

"Then I should like Prince Boris of Carinthia, please. He's too simply divinely good-looking."

"And I," said Vere, "should like Martha Carter, the film star. If she's really anything like she seemed in 'Strangled Kisses'

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even the jelly-fish in the sea will develop spines."

"Very well," replied their father. "It may be a little difficult, but I've tackled worse problems in the past. And you, Helen? Is there any particular guest who takes your fancy?"

"You had better not tempt me, William. Just now I'm simply a psychological hurricane clinging feebly to my self-respect. If I were to let go I should do things that would make Cleopatra and Helen of Troy revolve in their graves like aeroplane propellers."

"Then we will leave it at that," suggested Mr. Sterling, who had been married a long time.

II.

WHAT is more attractive than the City office of a threefold millionaire financier, with its cheerful motto, "*Pecunia non olet*," lending gaiety to even the humblest transaction? Nevertheless, at 9000, Lombard Street Mr. Sterling shed some of the *bonhomie* of a husband and father. The wanton lapwing got himself a newer crest, so to speak, and became clothed in the full dignity of his fifty years.

A grave young secretary with the brand of Harton and Camford on his brow obtained a telephone number, and spoke to his counterpart, who served a Fleet Street newspaper proprietor, murmuring:—

"That you, old boy? My old man wants to speak to yours. Can do? Stout fellow!" Then gravely over the house telephone to Mr. Sterling:—

"Through to Sir George Heywiddy, sir."

Mr. Sterling picked up the receiver.

"That you, George? If I were you I should buy Amalgamated Milk for a rise. Thought you'd like to know. Not 'tall. Oh, and I want to meet Martha Carter, the film star. Yeh, her. Could your film critic arrange it? Means a free lunch for him. Many thanks. 'Bye."

Mr. Sterling pressed a bell push and a red light appeared over the secretary's desk. He entered and Mr. Sterling said:—

"Fortescue, do you know Prince Boris of Carinthia's private secretary?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know the equerry, or whatever he's called, attached to him when he's in England?"

"No, sir."

"Come, come, Fortescue! After all you don't belong to all these clubs and football teams and what not for nothing, and your father's Lord Steward of the Garages, high up in Court circles. Arrange a meeting between the Prince and myself. I want to ask him down to Goldensands."

"It will be a little difficult, I fear, sir——"

"Stuff, Fortescue. The man hasn't got a bean. I could buy up Carinthia tomorrow. I don't care what it costs; my daughter wants him for a dance partner."

Rollo Carteret de Lisle Fortescue went out and laid his head on his folded arms.

When, eventually, after who knows what scratching of backs and pulling of wires, what tribulation on the part of the Lord Steward of the Garages, Mr. Sterling found himself ushered into the Prince's library, his father's heart misgave him on account of April. Prince Boris resembled all the heroes of collar, shaving soap, and athletic underwear advertisements rolled into one. His clothes positively grew upon him, and the smile with which he greeted his visitor seemed composed exclusively of the ultra-violet rays.

"Good morning, Mr. Sterling," said the Prince in perfect English. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you? Pray sit down."

"Thank you, sir," replied Mr. Sterling, and bowed over the royal hand. "It's very good indeed of you. There is the question of this Carinthian Loan which there is some talk of floating in the City."

"*Ah! Parfaitement!*" exclaimed the Prince in perfect French. "Unfortunately that is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my financial advisers. As a constitutional ruler——"

"Quite, sir. The trouble is that your financial advisers haven't made much headway. The finances of Carinthia——"

"*Madre de Dios!*" interrupted the Prince in perfect Spanish, "there are no finances of Carinthia. Why else should we want a loan, Mr. Sterling?"

"What I suggest, sir, is that you should be my guest for a few days at the Millionaires' Club at Goldensands. I think I may promise that the loan could be arranged between myself and my fellow-millionaires. The club is, of course, utterly exclusive, and your own apartments would be strictly private. We can offer you some pretty good polo, motor-boat racing, golf, and even a little roulette if you care for that sort of thing. Nothing, of course, would be allowed to get into the papers."

"For the sake of my impoverished country I would do much," said the Prince, "but are you quite sure about this loan, Mr. Sterling? Even princes have their disappointments."

"I am very conservative in matters of finance," replied Mr. Sterling. "For instance, I have settled nothing on my own son and daughter. They are allowed only a few thousands a year pocket-money and accounts

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at certain shops. I am quite sure the loan will be forthcoming after your stay amongst us, sir."

The Prince held out his hand, accompanied by the royal smile.

"Then I accept, being a slave to the welfare of my beloved country. My secretary will arrange details with you, Mr. Sterling," he said, graciously. "It will be a privilege to meet so many gentlemen eminent in the financial world. Do I understand that this is entirely a bachelor gathering, or will there be ladies?"

"There will be the wives and daughters of the members, sir, and their guests. We ourselves have Miss Martha Carter, the film star, staying with us."

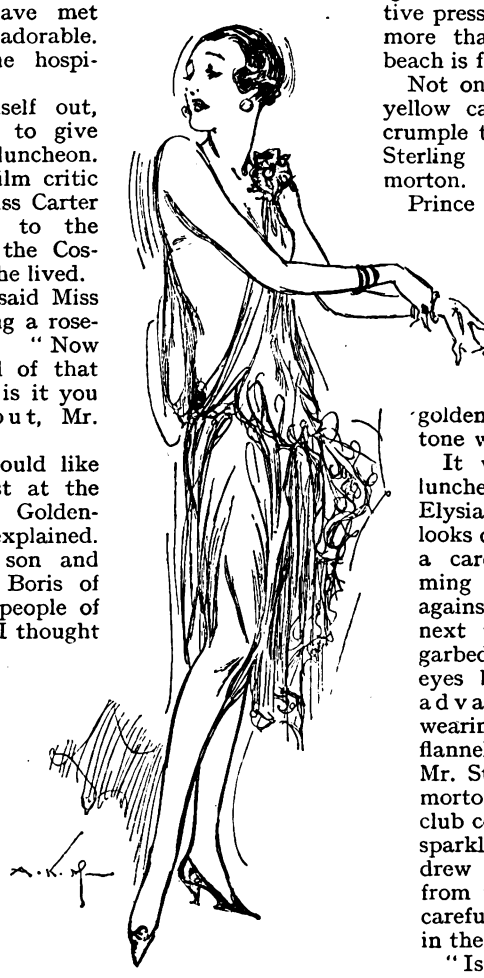
"Wine, women, and wireless," said the Prince, gaily. "I have met Miss Carter. She is adorable. You practise the true hospitality, Mr. Sterling."

Having bowed himself out, Mr. Sterling went on to give Miss Martha Carter luncheon. They got rid of the film critic without mercy and Miss Carter took her host back to the Babylonian Suite in the Cosmopolis Hotel, where she lived.

"I like rich men," said Miss Carter, frankly, lighting a rose-leaf-tipped cigarette. "Now that we have got rid of that little gooseberry, what is it you want to talk about, Mr. Sterling?"

"My wife and I would like you to be our guest at the Millionaires' Club at Goldensands," Mr. Sterling explained. "There will be my son and daughter and Prince Boris of Carinthia and a few people of that sort. Ever since I thought of buying an interest in Silver Screens Incorporated, for whom I believe you star, we have all wanted to meet you."

"Pleased to have you meet me," declared Miss Carter. "Delighted to accept. All I wish is you would get them to can that Silver Screens director. I want him thrown to the lions. He has a line of talk that positively puts sand in one's bearings."



It had cost Mr. Sterling a thousand a year in school fees alone to achieve these results.

III.

GOLDENSANDS is one of those idyllic spots where the roses grow rosier and bluer than the sea-blue stream of the bays. The Millionaires' Club is built entirely of white marble, and the "cottages" of the members nestle, surrounded by smooth lawns, amid the pine trees. The Casino and Marble Arcade form a magnificent rendezvous, with quarters for the cabaret artistes, *vendeuses*, bar-attendants, and other low-lifers. The vast estate is walled off from the outer world, and the lodge gates are guarded by picked he-men packing two guns and a life-preserver apiece. The garages are full of splendid cars, the stables are full of splendid horses, the little harbour full of racing motor-boats, the mean effective pressure of whose engines is more than startling, and the beach is full of splendid girls.

Not one pebble exists on the yellow carpet of the sands to crumple the pearly toes of April Sterling or Diamond Throgmorton.

Prince Boris arrived in the private seaplane of Mr. Sterling, but her own car bore Martha Carter—that well-known car finished in dull gold with cream brocade upholstery and a golden-haired chauffeur to tone with the rest.

It was the hour of pre-luncheon cocktails at the Elysian Bar, whose veranda looks over the bay. April, in a cardinal one-piece swimming suit that crashed against her dark hair, sat next to Morgan Bond, also garbed for the waves. Her eyes beheld Prince Boris advancing towards them wearing an immaculate flannel suit, accompanied by Mr. Sterling and Mr. Throgmorton, the chairman of the club committee. April's eyes sparkled, and casually she drew her bath wrap aside from the most divine, most carefully pumice-stoned legs in the club.

"Isn't he marvellous?" she said to Morgan Bond. That young man scowled heavily.

"I loathe these greasy foreigners. He looks exactly like a Monte Carlo gigolo."

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" He's Colonel-in-Chief of the Carinthian Guards. I can't imagine you in the Guards, Morgan."

" Neither can I. Some of us have to work to keep them going."

" You needn't be jealous."

" Jealous my eye ; jealous of whom ? What is there for me to be jealous of him over ? " asked young Mr. Bond, intensely.

At this moment, curving across the hither lawn, came Miss Martha Carter in a jumper straight from the Rue de la Paix, a fringe of skirt beneath it, stockings of the thinnest, and a man-eating little hat. Vere, standing beside Diamond Throgmorton, gasped faintly.

" Oh, girlie, what legs ! "

" If you can call them legs," said Miss Throgmorton, gazing approvingly at her own. " To me they look more like matches. These film stars are obliged to starve, you know. It's in their contract that their weight mustn't increase. Probably she'll die in agony of rickets, or something, before she's thirty."

" It will have been jolly well worth it, to me at any rate. I've noticed you getting rather a coarse feeder lately, Diamond. That sort of thing has a slight tendency to put a fellow off. The remark is merely passed in all friendliness."

Mr. Sterling now gathered in Martha Carter, who kept getting lost over and over again for the sake of a little more publicity, and led her with the Prince to his marble cottage. Mrs. Sterling received them and sent them away to wash their hands for luncheon.

" Oh, William," she said to her husband, " he is so beautiful. Must I give him over to April's crude young methods ? "

" I am afraid so, Helen," Mr. Sterling answered gravely. " After all, it was for her sake I asked him, and remember that you and I date from the past. The present belongs to April and her kind."

' That may be very well for you, William, but a woman like myself is dateless. I am part of the dawn and the wind and the waves. His Royal Highness may perceive that, and then I won't answer for the consequences."

Seated beside the Prince at luncheon, April knew herself to be alone in the wide world with a sun-bronzed young god who was intended for her from the beginning of time. The butler, the footmen, her mother so middle-aged and hide-bound, her father stout and unsoulful, Vere with his appalling triviality, and that quite impossible Carter woman faded from her consciousness.

She heard the Prince saying to her : " In this paradise there are many houris, and have I not the flower of them beside me ? " and almost choked over her *filet de sole au vin blanc*. Nevertheless she managed to answer :—

" I fear, sir, it's the paradise that makes the houri, not the houri the paradise."

" When we have known one another a little longer," he insisted, " I shall persuade you that that is not so." The butler filled his glass and he drank gratefully because the whole world seemed full of girls and each new one bored him more than the rest.

On the other side of the table Vere was saying to Màrtha Carter :—

" How do you dare to be so beautiful ? " and Martha Carter, who had heard that sort of thing a million times before, replied absently : " Some say it's my eyes and some say it's my legs, but I guess it's just me. I gotta leaning that way."

AFTER luncheon April took the Prince out in her racing motor-boat. He went with her dutifully, although he would have loved to play poker with Mr. Sterling and a few selected friends. The Prince considered himself the best poker player in the under thirty-five class, and though riper years bring a certain considered judgment, on the other hand he had never in his life played with nothing but millionaires. Still walking beside him he saw not April, but the Carinthian Loan. Two and a half per cent. would stick to him if it went through.

They embarked with scores of jealous eyes fixed on April. Her young loveliness blossomed for him. They landed for tea at a little cove, and dreamily her fingers touched his over the passing of a tea-cup. The Prince, while entertaining her with royal charm, thought sadly of his pet dog, his pet horse, his favourite armchair, his stamp collection, even of the Prime Minister of Carinthia, a rather dreary person who told the same funny story over and over again.

At last, when all the buns and *pâté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches were eaten the Prince told himself with a sigh to get on with the good work. He encircled with his arm the yielding figure of April and raised her drooping head. " Let me see," he reflected, " what is the formula ? Ah, yes : Though a prince and, I trust, a gentleman, there are moments when temptation becomes overwhelming.' " The Prince then kissed April a few times. Her lips parted in a sigh and her eyes closed.

' I wish," thought the Prince, " someone would invent a new lipstick. It is almost intolerable that they all taste the same."

Upon a far green hill Vere sat on a scarlet rug beside Martha Carter. His racing two-seater stood parked close by ; the *débris* of a tea-basket littered the grass.

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Vere was holding Martha's hand and saying things. Martha's compelling eyes rested on the distant horizon.

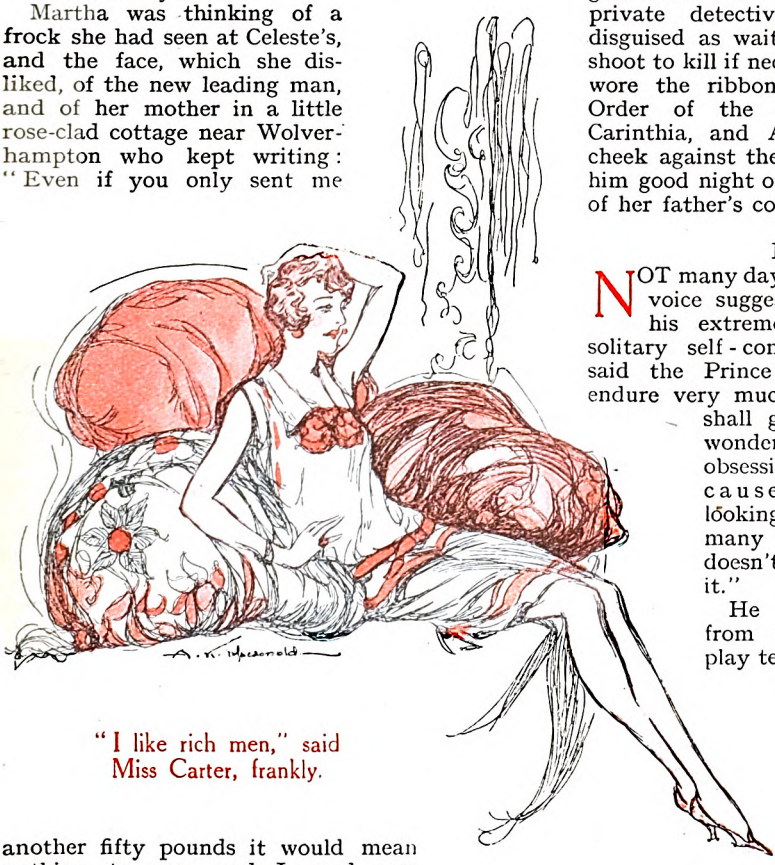
"You're the loveliest thing, Martha."

"Yes, honey."

"I never saw such a peach anywhere."

"Yes, honey."

Martha was thinking of a frock she had seen at Celeste's, and the face, which she disliked, of the new leading man, and of her mother in a little rose-clad cottage near Wolverhampton who kept writing: "Even if you only sent me another fifty pounds it would mean nothing to you, and I need new woollens very badly."



"I like rich men," said Miss Carter, frankly.

"If I might take you away to some island where we could live together and never see another soul——"

"Yes, honey. And what should we live *on?*"

"Well, I've only got my allowance, because father won't settle anything on me——"

"I might have known, the hard-boiled old tight-wad," thought Martha, and, aloud: "Don't worry, kid. I'm not settling on you either."

In despair Vere encircled her slender figure with his arm and tilted her drooping head. She broke delicately from his long embrace.

"Sorry, but I do that sort of thing for hours on the lot. And it may be coincidence, but every man's shaving soap, or talc powder, or whatever it is, seems to smell exactly the same. It kind of gives me the willies."

That night Mr. Sterling provided a gala dinner at the Casino Restaurant, to meet the Prince and Miss Carter. The solid gold dinner service was used, and private detectives went on duty disguised as waiters, with orders to shoot to kill if necessary. The Prince wore the ribbon and star of the Order of the Purple Sunset of Carinthia, and April scratched her cheek against the star when bidding him good night on the moonlit loggia of her father's cottage.

IV.

NOT many days later some inward voice suggested to the Prince his extreme need of a little solitary self-communion. "For," said the Prince to himself, "if I endure very much more of April I shall go mad. It is no wonder I have become an obsession with her, because I am very good-looking and unique in many ways, but that doesn't help one to bear it."

He therefore escaped from an assignation to play tennis after luncheon, and doubling like a hunted animal discovered a building he had never seen before, which proved to be the servants' bathing establishment. The Prince hastened within and sat down sadly on a hard and hygienic bench.

"I shall be safe here," he reflected. "No one will disturb me because servants simply will not take time from play in order to have baths. I can assemble my scattered wits. I can think out a way of escape. Sterling said something about staying for a fortnight, but that's absurd."

He paused at the sound of footsteps. Before he could conceal himself Martha Carter appeared in the simple yet dignified entrance, with the air of a nymph fleeing from a satyr.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "it's only you, Prince. I was afraid it might be that Sterling boy with the haunted eyes. He follows me about like Mary's lamb."

"You, too!" said the Prince with a deep

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groan. Martha Carter nodded, picked her weary way across the tiled floor, and sat down beside him.

"Me, too," she echoed. "Old Man Sterling has got us in his toils. We are the bone rings for his darlings to cut their sentimental teeth on. Bone rings! I'll say we're bone-heads."

The Prince rose and kissed her hand, but she drew it away.

"Don't. That reminds me of work on location. What are you doing in this gilded cage?"

"You are a woman of the world," suggested the Prince, sitting down again. "Frankly, it's a matter of poverty. My presence is the price of a Carinthian Loan from these odious plutocrats. A Carinthian Loan would mean a lot to me."

"You poor boy! Pa Sterling blackmailed me into it by hinting he was going to buy up the outfit that hires me. I haven't a hope."

"But surely you are rich?"

"You forget the current price of beauty. What with that, and the car and the Babylonian Suite, a thousand a week goes nowhere. The competition's absolutely fierce. I used to get a raft of things just for a testimonial. Now all sorts of prize-fighters, and authors, and Atlantic fliers cut in on that."

"The sale of my picture postcards is not at all what it was," said the Prince, sadly. "It isn't as if I could marry that impossible girl. Her father has settled nothing on her."

"Same with Vere. Of course, you and I are a couple of suckers, Prince. We ought to set about the parents. I could vamp that old fool easily."

"Who indeed could resist those eyes?"

"You with your figure and military bearing might very well get hold of the old lady. She's got to the romantic age."

"You are too kind."

"I'm not; I'm desperate. I shouldn't suggest that sort of thing, but I'm getting old. You mightn't believe it, but I'm twenty-five."

"I also," the Prince admitted, sadly. "My Press notices are nothing like what they were, but when one has turned thirty it is not to be expected."

Martha Carter rose from her seat with an air of determination.

"We need to try it, Prince. The old birds for ours. They may divorce and marry us. At the worst he'll buy us off."

'You, yes," agreed the Prince, "but I doubt if he'd buy me off. He might only start divorce proceedings and give me his blessing when the decree was made absolute. It's about all he would give me."

V.

MORGAN BOND, coming in from a round of golf with Daphne Contango, the best-looking girl in the younger set of the Kaffir Circus, paused for a moment beside April, seated alone on the golf pavilion veranda.

"Not playing to-day?" he inquired, while Daphne made unnecessary use of her lipstick.

"Dear me, neither am I. I thought I was just holing out on the ninth green. My mistake," said April, politely.

"Is that your mother driving off with the Prince? Can I believe my eyes?" went on Morgan Bond in mock horror.

"You might as well believe them as long as you aren't looking in a mirror. If you were you might think they exaggerated the horrors of life."

"And how do you propose to spend the afternoon, April?"

"I am reading my book. I can read quite well, even the long words."

"Well, toodle-oo," said Morgan Bond, and toodled away with Daphne.

Up on the tennis courts Diamond Throgmorton, accompanied by young George Bear, better known as the Sheik of the Industrial Market, halted beside Vere, stretched gloomily in a deck-chair behind the side-line.

"No pat-ball this afternoon?" she queried, artlessly.

"I think I have a sick headache coming on, Diamond."

"Isn't that your father playing singles with Martha Carter on number six court? Very active at his age."

"Am I my father's keeper?" demanded Vere, so acidly that Diamond put her little hand on George Bear's arm and went off with him to have an iced sundae.

Things were beginning to look very black indeed for the young Sterlings.

Long after tea they converged on their marble cottage, now silent as the grave. The glittering tones of Martha Carter, the virile accents of the Prince, the indolent coo of their mother, and the middle-aged pobble of their father no longer made music on the air. Save for the butler and a platoon of footmen gumshoeing about on flat feet, no living soul disturbed the stillness. Over a couple of cocktails they tried to do a cross-word puzzle, and failed. Presently they bathed and dressed and sat down to a dinner-table laid for six occupied only by themselves.

"I see the Chiswick murderer is caught," muttered Vere at last.

"Really! The flying squad are too marvellous nowadays," April answered, but there was no heart in her words. She

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Curving across the hither lawn came Miss Martha Carter in a jumper straight from the Rue de la Paix, a fringe of skirt beneath it, stockings of the thinnest, and a man-eating little hat.

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did but keep up appearances before the servants, who must never be allowed to guess.

But they themselves knew that *they* had gone out together, in a couple of mixed lonesomes.

Dinner over they sat stiffly in the drawing-room and drank their coffee and liqueurs with aching hearts. After a time Vere switched on the wireless. The President of the South Hackney Electric Light Company was giving a talk entitled: "Some Personal Reminiscences of Shunt Windings," and he switched it off again. At last he said with an air of resolution :—

"I can't stand this any longer. I'm going to see for myself."

"Right-ho, Vere. I'll go with you."

They slipped quietly out at the back of the cottage, crossed a lawn, and came into the shadow of the pine trees. Against the rough bole of one mighty monarch of the forest two figures stood blotted in one another's arms. Vere and April tiptoed softly over the carpet of pine-needles, only to find themselves wrong in their suspicion. It was Herbert Forthright, Mr. Sterling's personal bodyguard, embracing Sally Cotton, Mrs. Sterling's personal maid.

"Forthright," said Vere, sternly, "I expected better of you than this."

"Sally," April exclaimed, "I never dreamed you would stoop to such conduct. This is what comes of going to the pictures."

"How dare you, Forthright," Vere went on, "let my father out of your sight in these days of thugs, safe-breakers, cat-burglars, and gun-men? Where is Mr. Sterling?"

Herbert Forthright, coming smartly to attention, answered :—

"In accordance with Mr. Sterling's orders, sir, I went off dooty at four p.m. I am instructed not to say where Mr. Sterling is."

"Sally!" insisted April, "answer me. What have you done with my mother?"

"I p-put out the gold lamé and the ermine wrap for her, Miss April, and when she had had her ba-ba-bath I helped her to dress and fixed the wave in her hair. And she said, 'I sha'n't need you any more to-night, Cotton, because I'm dining out and I shall be late, and if anyone asks where I'm going, tell them you don't know.'"

"If you refuse to confess where my father is, Forthright," said Vere, "I shall have you sacked for kissing my mother's maid, and all your wives and children, of which, if only we knew the truth, I dare say you have a large quantity, will starve."

"You do me an injustice, sir, me being a widower and the newspaper cutting of the inquest to prove it."

April took Sally by the shoulder and shook her till her teeth chattered.

"Tell me where my mother has gone, or I'll have you sacked for kissing Forthright."

"There's no ha-harm in it, Miss April, as long as a girl doesn't kiss back."

Vere folded his arms and said with a heavy frown :—

"You two can please yourselves. Either confess, or never darken the doors of the servants' hall again."

Sally addressed herself to her guilty accomplice.

"I have come to a girl's cross-roads, Herbert. You must choose between your master's honour and your love for me."

"I shall follow the dictates of my 'eart," replied Herbert Forthright with a manly ring in his voice. "Mr. Sterling, Mr. Vere, has gone motoring in the moonlight with Miss Carter."

"And Mrs. Sterling," Sally added, "has gone out in a boat on the bay in the moonlight with His Royal Highness."

"Have you your gun, Forthright?" inquired his young master.

"Sir, according to regulations I have pistols, automatic, Smithers & Jones, Mark VI, two."

"Give me one of them."

"And give me the other," echoed April between her clenched teeth.

Then, fully armed, brother and sister disappeared into the night.

VI.

NEXT day it proved no longer possible to keep things from the servants. The night-watchman at the little harbour had seen April fling herself into her racing motor-boat, pistol in hand, and go tearing out over the bay, nearly taking the ornamental lighthouse with her. The night staff at the garage had seen Vere fling himself into his racing car, pistol in hand, and go tearing out into the darkness, ruining the wing of Mr. Throgmorton's Thompson-Johnson limousine as he passed. Besides, there were the footmen. Footmen are not deaf, and they could not help hearing the Prince say to Mrs. Sterling at luncheon :—

"In this paradise there are many houris, and have I not the flower of them beside me?"

Or Mr. Sterling murmur passionately to Martha Carter :—

"How dare you be so beautiful?"

How could they help seeing all four turn and look at Vere and April as one looks at a toad or a tax-collector, signifying in the usual manner that collectively they considered Vere and April *de trop*.

And all the while Morgan Bond still

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dallied with Daphne Contango, and Diamond Throgmorton with George Bear.

Merely toying with their food, the forlorn brother and sister quickly made their escape to April's sitting-room. There she stretched herself on a divan and Vere stood before the fireplace in a heroic attitude. He began to say a lot of things all beginning with "I shall" or "I sha'n't."

"I sha'n't stand it, April. I shall go and see old Throgmorton, the chairman of the club committee. I shall put it on grounds of decency—two elderly married people bunny-hugging about with a man and a girl young enough to be their children. I shall ask him what sort of an influence he thinks all this'll have on the young generation like ourselves. I shall make it a question of public morals."

"Oh, Vere," April answered, wearily, "for Heaven's sake don't talk about morals. They're *so* out of date. Talk about expediency; it's so *much* more fashionable. You go and beat the air with old Throgmorton, and I'll have a cut at old Mrs. Bond, the president of the ladies' social committee. I'll try and borrow something more reminiscent of a skirt than this from someone. Who do you think would be likely? Mother's are shorter than mine."

Unfortunately Vere had no luck with Mr. Throgmorton. He found him a little stertorous after luncheon, a cigar clasped between his teeth and a desire for sleep in his soul. He listened to Vere's complaint about Mr. Sterling's conduct, and suddenly all desire for sleep vanished.

"It occurs to me," said Mr. Throgmorton, "that it was you who bashed up the wing

"Though a prince and, I trust, a gentleman, there are moments when temptation becomes overwhelming." The Prince then kissed April a few times.

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Martha was thinking of a frock she had seen at Celeste's, and the face, which she disliked, of the new leading man, and of her mother in a little rose-clad cottage.

of my car last night. Now I don't care about the cost of a new wing, for money means nothing to me, but what I object to is the sheer brass-faced impudence of you young fellers who think you can go rum-busting about damaging other people's property without so much as by your leave, damme. Cars aren't like angels; they don't grow wings of their own accord."

Breath.

"Not only that, but at one time you were always sitting in Diamond's pocket, and now a daughter of mine doesn't seem good enough for you and she goes about with young Bear; and if I had to see a man killed in a street accident, which God forbid, I'd as soon it were young Bear as anybody I know."

More breath.

"Lastly" (said Mr. Throgmorton), "what your father, a very old friend of mine, cares to do is no business of yours, my young friend, and if we were both ten years younger I should lay you across my knee and try and teach you a little respect for your elders and betters."

Feeling himself to be slightly misunderstood, Vere then took his leave, only to learn that April had succeeded no better than himself.

"There was a time," Mrs. Bond had remarked, "when I feared I might have to look upon you in the light of a daughter-in-law, April, but luckily, after your treatment of him, Morgan seems to have got over his craze for you; so it can't embitter our future relations if I tell you I've always considered you a flighty puss. I've known your dear mother since the days of our early struggles, when we only kept nine servants apiece and had to have some of the washing done at home. I listened with the greatest grief and shame to your cruel accusations against your dear mother. If, after the tears and anxieties you must have caused her by growing up as you have, she feels inclined to drown her sorrows in a little fun, it's no business of yours or mine, and what I say is good luck to her, I say."

Again the young Sterlings met in April's sitting-room, but now there was no more snap in their garters. They had encountered care, sorrow, and strife. At last April said, brokenly:—

"There's just one ray of hope left, Vere. After all, we are their children."

"I've always taken it for granted, April, but what's that got to do with it?"

"If we are their children they are our parents, and surely even in these days parents have some responsibilities? Surely we can appeal to their better nature?"

"It will be like looking for a needle in a haystack, but we might try."

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They ran their parents to earth taking tea with Martha and the Prince in a secluded corner of the garden. Vere, being the first-born, spoke for self and sister.

"Father, forgive my interrupting, but April and I would like a private conversation with mother and you whenever it's convenient."

Mr. Sterling frowned slightly and looked at his wife. Mrs. Sterling answered, playing carelessly with her teaspoon:—

"Your father and I are very much dated up just now, Vere."

"But remember, Mummy," pleaded April, "it is your little boy and girl who are asking. Can it be that you don't love us any more?"

Mrs. Sterling raised her eyebrows at her husband. "Tk! Tk!" murmured Mr. Sterling, impatiently. "Well, Martha has an appointment with the club hairdresser at five."

"And the Prince has official letters to write about then," added Mrs. Sterling. "But I hope it won't take long, April and Vere. I am going to the fancy dress ball this evening as Venus, and I must have a pedicure first."

VII.

AT four-fifty p.m. Mrs. Sterling in the smoking lounge of the cottage glanced down appreciatively at her silken knees and said to her husband:—

"I suppose our good time is almost over, William?"

"'Fraid so. The Prince and Martha had better go in the morning. They've served their turn. After all, Helen, East, West, home's best, and there's nothing like family life."

"No, thank God. Still, I've sublimated a good many of my complexes in the last few days."

"I really don't know what you mean, Helen."

Outside on the mat Vere and April shuffled their feet and whispered together.

"The thing is, Vere, they mustn't divorce and marry Martha and the Prince. We don't want them for step-parents. They'd know too much and cost too much. Go on, open the door. You're a man, and it's your job."

They then entered and, standing respectfully with their hands behind their backs, appealed earnestly to their parents' better nature, imploring them to give up unseemly flirtation and comfort one another in their declining years.

After a pause Mr. Sterling cleared his throat and delivered a short speech.

"A wise father knows his children, and does his best to guide their little wayward footsteps. Seeing as I did that you, Vere, and you, April, imagined you despised the simple pleasures of home and your kind parents, I asked the Prince and Martha Carter here at your request. You, April, felt sure you could captivate His Royal Highness, but he saw at once that you would never make a good, hard-working, early-rising princess, opening bazaars and inspecting hospitals. And Martha knew that you, Vere, would never be able to support her in the style to which she is accustomed. I took the liberty of explaining that neither of you had any money beyond your allowances. Instantly the Prince and Martha turned to your mother and myself, because we have charm, tact, poise, insight, and are very rich. Directly you felt yourselves about to lose your dear parents to a couple of strangers you realized that after all your affections lay with us and that there is no place like home."

"Yes, Daddy."

"Society," ended Mr. Sterling, "is founded on these simple truths. All is now forgotten and forgiven and our guests leave in the morning. I have arranged a loan for the Prince and backing for Miss Carter. As I said before, money whispers louder than blue blood, and we millionaires must stick together."

"Mummy," asked April, twisting her handkerchief shyly, "may I have Morgan to dinner to-morrow?"

"And, Mummy," asked Vere, blushing slightly, "may I have Diamond to dinner too?"

"Yes, dears, if you behave yourselves and don't let them stay too late. Young people should be in bed early. Now you may both run along."

When the door had closed behind them, Mrs. Sterling said to her husband:—

"Wasn't it heavenly, William?"

"The best holiday we've had for years. P'r'aps Vere and April will need the same treatment again."

"I'm afraid not, but our grandchildren may. After all, when they're Vere's and April's ages you'll only be seventy and I'll only be sixty-five."

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SYBIL THORNDIKE

By RUSSELL THORNDIKE

NO pioneer showed more courage in an enterprise than did José Levy in bringing to London a *Grand Guignol*. He had not only to back his own opinion against adversaries but against friends, who were one and all unanimous that Guignol, although successful in Paris, could never be so in England. The French were an emotional race—the English were "roast-beefy and foggy." Levy would not allow this at all. "The English," he said, "are shy and outwardly reserved, but actually they are highly emotional. The English are at bottom a temperamental race." We all hoped he was right, but couldn't be sure. Anyway, José Levy was prepared to ruin himself both financially and artistically in his endeavour to bring Grand Guignol over the Channel. The Little Theatre was ideal for his project. Small, comfortable, in a side street, as a Guignol should be, but central and of course intimate. He took the theatre on a long lease, and began to gather around him artists of advanced views. Designers, artists, playwrights, musicians, actors and actresses, and one producer, Lewis Casson, were selected by him with the idea of building up a whole. I suppose very few companies have been chosen with such care. As the first Guignol, Levy and Lewis realized that the secret of success for such a scheme was not so much individual performances as team-work, and we were all of us picked not so much for our particular types as for the quality of being able to pull our weight in the boat.

And each play was given the most careful and original production. Lewis Casson has since done more spectacular productions for Sybil, but he can never eclipse the cunning with which he handled programme after programme of those varied plays. To him must go the credit for superhuman work. He was most fortunate in his stage director, Cyril Cattley. I suppose no stage-manager has ever been set so difficult a task. When one thinks that seven complete "sets" were used in every performance, and it was Cattley who was responsible for the manipulation and changing of these generally very elaborate sets on one of the smallest stages in London, it really called at times for a miracle man.

By the success of our first Guignol programme we were all convinced that the idea had come to stay, and Sybil began even to fear that she would have to play in it all her life. She's always terrified of being tied down to one thing, though Heaven knows Guignol was never one thing; it is much too versatile. The much-discussed "Lavatory" play brought us a tremendous cheap advertisement. We were attacked by all the purity brigade, who, as Sewell Collins, the adapter, said, "rushed about London whispering, 'I hear it's simply outrageous. When shall we go?'" As a matter of fact, the scene of this grim little comedy was set in the cloak-room of a French restaurant. Sybil and Dolly Minto played *demi-mondaines* in it—two marvellous performances which, of course, added insult to injury to those who think the theatre should only portray things and characters that are "nice." "The Hand of Death" was the first of the André de Lorde dramas that we did. Sybil made a great sensation in this, as also did our dear friend George Bealby, who proved himself a tragedian of the first rank. George had spent his life playing farce up to this, and had confined his great tragic bent to reading Greek plays in the original.

The great joke of the first programme, though, was "Oh, Hell," a revuette written by Reginald Arkell and myself, with music by Albert Fox. Sybil appeared in this as a revue "leading lady, with song and dance," and showed that, if she wasn't allowed to be highbrow and tragic, there was at least a more popular field for her to work in. Arkell and I were fortunate to bag another of her original performances in "Mr. Punch." Her Judy was so gloriously wooden that nobody would believe that it was she.

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and ST. JOAN

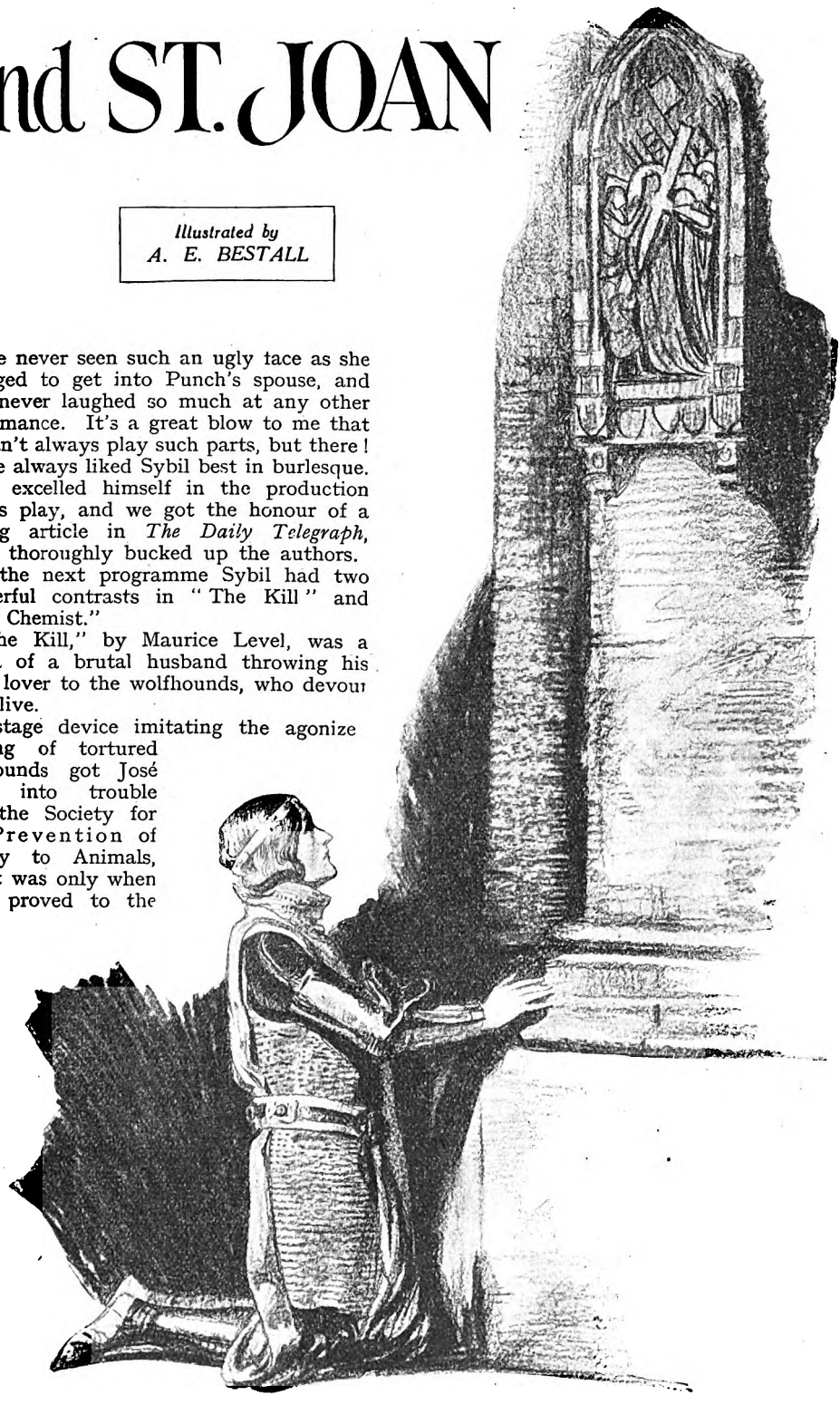
Illustrated by
A. E. BESTALL

I have never seen such an ugly face as she managed to get into Punch's spouse, and have never laughed so much at any other performance. It's a great blow to me that she can't always play such parts, but there! I have always liked Sybil best in burlesque. Lewis excelled himself in the production of this play, and we got the honour of a leading article in *The Daily Telegraph*, which thoroughly bucked up the authors.

In the next programme Sybil had two wonderful contrasts in "The Kill" and "The Chemist."

"The Kill," by Maurice Level, was a drama of a brutal husband throwing his wife's lover to the wolfhounds, who devour him alive.

A stage device imitating the agonize howling of tortured wolfhounds got José Levy into trouble with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and it was only when Lewis proved to the



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Inspector that the only ill-usage inflicted upon anybody was caused to the lungs of the company barking through lamp-glasses that poor José was saved from being hurled into prison for cruelty to dumb animals.

The curtain was hardly down on "The Kill," with its weird beauty, before it was up again on "The Chemist's" shop, with Sybil miraculously transformed from a beautiful Rossetti figure to an idiot girl comic. Again, as in Judy, the audience would not believe it was Sybil. They thought it was a mistake in the programme, and once more I wondered why Sybil didn't stick to burlesque. "Rounding the Triangle," a brilliant comedy by Crawshay Williams, nearly proved a tragedy to Lewis and Sybil, for they shared this play with the wonderful Athene Seyler, and the agony of keeping straight faces was acute. There is something about Athene that would make our family laugh at a funeral. I found in "Shepherd's Pie," during the same bill, that I couldn't possibly meet her eye. But if Athene can be comic, she can also be dreadful. She terrified Sybil in that much-discussed play, "The Old Women." This play was, perhaps, the greatest of all in stage-construction. The art of André de Lorde, that great Parisian Prince of Terror, was superb. Terror started at the rise of the curtain and before the climax was reached it was nearly unbearable. Barbara Gott and Athene were loathsome as two of the old hags, and Sybil's terror of them was soul-shuddering, and when I came on as the old lady maniac with the bodkin I longed to shout a brotherly warning so that Sybil could jump over the footlights and take refuge in the Savage Club, and thus save her eyes from being gouged out.

THAT June a big *matinée* for charity was held at the New Theatre, and Sybil performed the death scene of Katharine of Aragon. Lady Wyndham was very much impressed, and told Sybil that, if she had a good play, she would be willing to pay losses on it in case of a dead failure. Sybil and Lewis were overjoyed at the thought of their own management in the West-end, and suggested all sorts of plays, but none of them seemed suitable. However, they finally got hold of a version of Henri Bataille's play, "Scandal," which met with approval, and they opened their season with St. John Ervine's "Jane Clegg," to be followed in six weeks by the new play.

The moment the "Scandal" was safely launched, Sybil, of course, began to think of special *matinées* of something else, so "Medea" was put on, with Leslie Faber, who was the leading man in the company, as Jason These *matinées* did so well that Sybil felt here was a chance to do the play she had really set her heart on—the "Cenci" of Shelley. It was a hundred years since Shelley's death, and the ban on the play was therefore lifted, but Sybil and Lewis consulted the Censor and asked permission nevertheless. This was granted, and the "Cenci" had most successful performances, as all the world and his wife turned up to see the play that was considered to be the most horrible thing ever written for the stage. However, it made money, and luckily did not have to call on Lady Wyndham to help it out of a hole, and great critics said that Sybil's Beatrice Cenci was one of those beautiful, rare performances that one could never forget.

"Scandal" ran till December, when Sybil and Lewis took a holiday. They went to Italy, their first visit, which Sybil said was the greatest treat she had ever had in her life, and they came back full of beans and wanting to produce "Macbeth," but no suitable theatre was available. So they took the Criterion in partnership with Lady Wyndham's son, Bronson Albery, and put on Herbert Farjeon's and Horace Horsnell's play, "Advertising April."

This was the beginning of a very happy partnership, Bronson Albery supplying something which Sybil and Lewis entirely lacked, and this something was that important and elusive faculty of knowing more or less what the public wants. This sense, mixed with a genuine love of good stuff, made him a most valuable friend and ally.

However, this is by the way. Suffice it to say that "Advertising April" was a great success, though Sybil got into terrible hot water from the highbrows for daring to play burlesque when she had already been set down as a tragedienne. Many letters did she have deploring her frivolous performance. "You are very funny, Miss Thorndike, but do remember that tragedy is your realm. You cannot rule in both." To do Sybil justice, she doesn't want to rule at all. She only wants to be allowed to act, and always different things. She'll never stick to one thing or just be one sort of person in the theatre any more than she could ever be one sort of Sybil Thorndike.

Presently the Albery-Cassons were ready with another play, "The Lie" of Henry Arthur Jones. Sybil fancied this because she had to do a bit of throttling. Lady Wyndham and Bronson Albery fancied it because it had commercial possibilities, so the Cassons, very bucked with life again, started rehearsing. Now, some months before, news had come that Bernard Shaw was writing a play on Joan of Arc, and Sybil was in a fever lest she should not be allowed to play it.

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I believe another writer was already at work on a Joan play for her, but of course Shaw was beyond her wildest dreams. She wrote, or probably it was Lewis who wrote, as Sybil has some absurd plan she works on of never interfering with Fate; anyway, one of them wrote—they can't remember which—and asked Shaw outright who was going to play it, and he wrote back saying that of course Sybil was going to play it, and that if anyone else happened to be writing the play for her, she could give it to another actress to do, for she had got to play his St. Joan.

Of course, it seemed to Sybil that Heaven had opened. Joan was her greatest heroine. She'd already read several plays, but always hated the sort of church-window saint that they invariably portrayed. "I hate a holy-bob Joan," she had often said to me. "Holy-bobs" is a word of ours that we coined in the Vicarage to describe those parishioners who were always full of "blessed moments" and kept their eyes skywards during service.

Her only terror was that perhaps Shaw would at last meet his Waterloo and make a rotten job of it. She needn't have worried, as we know. I believe it is true that Shaw chose Sybil after he'd seen her in the trial scene of Beatrice Cenci.

She met Mr. Shaw one day during the writing of the play, and he said that he was not writing the play at all, as there was so much that he'd found that Joan had actually said that he practically had to invent nothing. I suspect Mr. Shaw's modesty got a little the better of him.

However, Henry Arthur Jones lived up to his great reputation too, and "The Lie" was still running strong after six months, when Sybil only expected a few weeks out of it, so it was the Theatre Guild in America who produced Joan first. Sybil and Lewis, to say nothing of Mr. Shaw, got restive, and "The Lie" was withdrawn when playing to good money, and "St. Joan" was put up.

I must just retrace my steps here to tell of one morning when Sybil and Lewis journeyed to the Shaws' country-house to hear it read. Sybil said she never breathed once during the drive down, so full of dread was she in case it wasn't what she longed for. Garrard, the man who went with Scott on his Polar expedition, was there too, and with Mrs. Shaw they sat down to read half the play before lunch and half after.

Well, Mr. Shaw started. Sybil says no one can read a play like him, because he's a real actor, and acts each part as he comes to it without being actory, always being true. When he had finished the first scene she couldn't believe it could possibly go on like it, as it was so wonderful and so far exceeding what she'd hoped. It was the Joan that she had always tried to imagine.

But Joan did go on, and with a vengeance: and she remembers Mr. Shaw saying, after reading the scene on the Loire, which finishes with that theatrical thrill of the wind changing, and Dunois and Joan rushing out "For God and St. Denis," Sybil and Lewis being in floods of tears with excited emotion, "Well, that's the jam. Now the real play begins."

THEN he started off on the Tent Scene with Warwick, Cauchon, and de Stogumber. Stiff ecclesiastical argument and one of the most wonderfully-designed scenes in our language. And so on and so on through the play. When the Epilogue was reached, Sybil could hardly refrain from screaming. It was beyond her wildest dreams, and she agrees with most who know the play well, that the finest pearls of thought are in the Epilogue. This is real Shaw, unhampered. But I venture to think that no one can know all the pearls until they have played in it. Every night some new great thought seemed to leap out of the lines and hit one. I speak for myself when I say that it was the greatest thrill to play in that Epilogue.

Sybil walked on air during the month's rehearsal. The only thing that depressed her was that none of them could act the play as well as Shaw could. He knew every intonation he wanted, and it was always the true, the common-sense thing that he did want.

An amusing incident happened at dress rehearsal which thoroughly pleased Sybil. Charles Ricketts had done all the wonderful designs and dresses for the play, when Mr. Shaw came on to the stage and said: 'Scenery and clothes have ruined my play. Why can't you play it in plain clothes, like at rehearsal? Sybil is much more like Joan in her ordinary jumper and skirt than when dressed up like this, with her face all painted." Sybil jumped for joy. She hates scenery, hates costumes, and always says she can act better with a towel round her head and her face ordinary. I wish this was merely a pose of Sybil's, but it isn't. I hate to hear the tinselly side of the stage run down. Give me big drums, spangles, and wind-boxes. I was very thankful that John Foulds had been allowed to write incidental music for Joan. He likes trumpets. So do theatres.

If ever there was an electric first night, Joan's was. A challenging first night. Everyone most heated. Some cursing Shaw for his pulling down of a saint, and some licking the pavement in front of him in

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wonder. But all agreed it was big stuff. The notices of the first performance were not too wonderful, but even they didn't stop the public. When a play has real success in it, no notices can stop it. They only stop second-class plays, which always seems to me a pity, as second-class is better than none, and oh, how very few first-class plays there are; and even then we find out that they are first-class when it is too late.

"St. Joan" played to capacity for six months or thereabouts, and then, as they couldn't have the theatre any longer, off they went on a tour which had been booked up for "The Lie." This did brilliantly, and after four months the Casson-Albery Company came back to play "St. Joan" for another six months.

Their next success was a tour of "St. Joan," which did magnificently, and once more the Albery-Cassons were treading air and planning a great production of "Henry VIII.," with Charles Ricketts once more to come to their aid with scenery and costumes. They most ambitiously took the Empire for this production. Everybody thought them more cracked than they really are. Shakespeare at the Empire! The day it was announced in the Press I was at a theatrical lunch, and everyone came up asking if Sybil had quite gone off her head. In the middle of a conversation about the absurdity of "Henry" at the Empire, that wonderful Marie Tempest came up and said: "Don't you worry. Sybil is the one person who will be able to get away with it there. She'll be a success, you see." And thankful we all were that the great actress was right. The production was splendid. It had to be. People still remember Irving's and Tree's, and "Henry VIII." is a pageant. As usual, they collected round them a distinguished cast, and there were many beautiful things in the playing which made it a success, chiefest of all being Sybil's performance of the Queen. Her death-scene is one of the most moving things she has done; but there!—she adores the part, and when she adores a part that she is also well suited to, she always gets away with it. Another remarkable performance was the King of Norman V. Norman, who had played it with us years before at the Old Vic, and whom Sybil insisted on having with her.

After a few months' run a revival of "St. Joan" took place at the Lyceum, with a real popular audience. They loved it there, but unfortunately the Great Strike rather dished things, though Sybil and Lewis wouldn't close up shop before their time was out. Lewis rather liked the strike, as his car was called up, and he drove people about, and put everyone's back up when he chauffeured the Trade Unions people. Very tactless, we thought. But Lewis is like that. He never plays up to the Government that's in.

Then came the invitation to play at the International Festival in Paris. "St. Joan" was the play chosen for Paris, with special *matinées* of "Medea." They took a wonderful company of enthusiasts who

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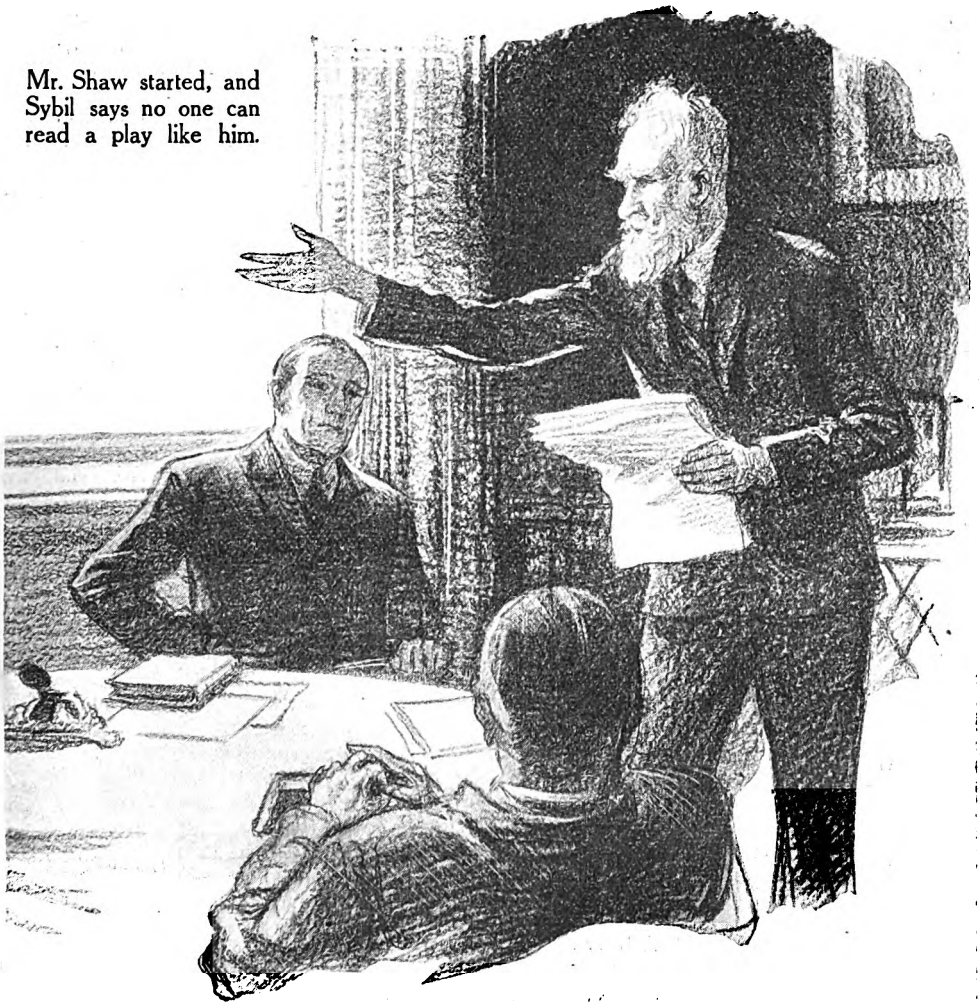

Mr. Shaw started, and Sybil says no one can read a play like him.

had played in "Joan" before, as we had not much time for rehearsals, and were not able to get a dress rehearsal, owing to the Champs Elysées Theatre being used on the Sunday night for something else. Tom Kealy decided that it would be good for business if we flew—he always thinks of publicity stunts—so he chartered an Imperial Airways liner, and off we went to Croydon—the scenery and those members of the company who were not insured going by sea. I mention this flight because it really does show Sybil's amazing versatility. She felt perfectly all right going over, having swallowed all sorts of anti-air-sickness cures, but when the engines shut off and we skimmed down to the aerodrome at Le Bourget she felt ghastly. From the windows we saw a large crowd of Parisian actors and actresses, who had come to welcome her with bouquets and speeches. Sybil's complexion had by this time turned to an artistic shade of green, but with her usual fortitude she retired, was violently ill, and then, after applying a little powder to her nose, she stepped out of the aeroplane all smiles, and delivered a charming speech in excellent French to the effect that she had never felt happier in her life—which, of course, she couldn't possibly have meant.

PARIS was a great artistic success for Sybil personally, but it cost her a small fortune, though the company, for her sake and for the honour of playing for England in an International Festival, all agreed to work for bare expenses, with a proportionate share of the profits (if any). There weren't any. The expenses were too great, and, with the exception of certain artistic circles in

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Paris, the Festival did not seem to reach the Parisian public. The Champs Elysées is an enormous theatre, and Mary Casson played her first speaking part in it as Warwick's page, and we all gave her half-crowns every time she got a laugh on her one funny line. Once when she didn't—because the audience that night evidently didn't understand the joke—she just looked at me as Warwick, as much as to say, "You killed that point, Uncle Russell." Everyone could see in that performance great promise of a fine career.

We all thoroughly enjoyed Paris, though Sybil had a very hectic time of it, being entertained and entertaining. We struck up a great friendship with M. Gemier, the Director of the Odéon, who had organized the Festival. Sybil never regrets the Paris adventure. "Lost a lot of money, but we've all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, so what's it matter?" was her summing-up.

And there for the moment the Memoirs stop. Perhaps I have not dealt with my subject with the dignity that a reader might expect from the biographer of a tragedienne. But I know Sybil will not blame me for that, as deep down in that sincere heart of hers she knows she is a comic, and even if she is for the moment against "props"—and after her great productions it is perhaps natural that she should fall back into an Elizabethan complex—she can never cure the "props" of the theatre in her own soul and jolly personality. Wherever she goes, goes too the jolly bang of the showman's drum. When she laughs we hear the ridiculous trills of the wry-necked fife, and her boundless enthusiasm is like a host of clowns taking the nap. So may the coins continue to clatter into her plate, so that she can supply sufficient sausage-strings for her future harlequinades.

THE END.

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THE ALTAR OF HONOUR

By

ETHEL M. DELL

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS.

Her mother having met her death in a hunting accident, Charmaine, a lovely little golden-haired girl, was brought up in Ireland by her impoverished father and brutal stepsister, Griselda. At a party she met Rory ("Daredevil") Donovan, a merry-eyed naval cadet. Then began a childhood romance, which was, however, stopped by Griselda, and Charmaine lost touch with Rory. Some years afterwards Charmaine moved with her family to England, and was then sent to stay for the London Season with her other stepsister, Sylvia, married to Sir Bentle'gh Merrion. The lovely girl, now seventeen, on her first timid venture into Society attracted the notice of Lady Cravenstowe, who introduced Charmaine to her nephew, Basil Conister. Basil fell in love with Charmaine almost at first sight, and at Charmaine's first London dance asked her to sit out with him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAFE HAVEN.

THROUGHOUT the dances that followed, Charmaine seemed to herself as though she moved in a dream. The music and the laughter and the changing faces all around were no more than a brightly-patterned ribbon running in a strange and dazzling bewilderment of colour through her consciousness. Nothing was real to her except the memory of Basil Conister's quiet words: "It is in your power to make it last—if you will—if you really wish to."

As to the meaning of those words, there was of course but one explanation; but she shrank from facing that in such a tumult of undefined hopes and fears that the very foundations of her being seemed to be undermined and shaking.

"Having a good time, dear?" asked Lady Cravenstowe once, and Charmaine answered: "Oh, yes!" smiling, though hardly knowing that she spoke.

"Such a sweet child!" Lady Cravenstowe remarked to her sister-in-law and hostess, as Charmaine's next partner led her away.

"Yes, a great beauty!" agreed Mrs. Granard. "She will probably make her mark. Are you presenting her?"

"Not this season. It is too late. But I shall do my best to manage it next," said Lady Cravenstowe.

"I expect she will be married long before then," said Mrs. Granard. "She is such an *ingénue*. Someone is sure to get her."

"Not just anyone!" said Lady Cravenstowe with determination. "I shall see to that."

Mrs. Granard laughed. "You seem to have adopted her. Where are her people?"

"They don't count," said Lady Cravenstowe. "I am in sole charge."

It would have comforted Charmaine to have heard those words, for the strain had begun to tell upon her, and the turmoil within had developed into something that

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was very nearly allied to panic when Basil Conister came to her for his next dance.

She went with him willingly enough, for he was a friend who must of necessity be always welcome, but she was completely tongue-tied, and when he suggested that they should sit out in an alcove of the landing she moved mutely up the stairs beside him, feeling as if her knees were giving way beneath her.

IT was a dark recess to which he brought her, and further screened from observation by a huge flowering plant that trailed drooping boughs laden with white blossom in front of the velvet settee which occupied the nook.

"Think this'll do?" he asked cheerily.

She slipped into the niche and sank down in the deepest corner with a helpless sensation of being caught.

He followed and sat beside her, and in a moment her agitation reached him. He stretched out a quiet hand and gently took one of hers.

"You are shivering," he said. "What is it? Getting tired?"

His touch helped her; its warmth and its steadiness imparted comfort. Almost involuntarily her cold fingers fastened upon his, and she found that she could speak.

"No, I'm not really tired," she said, "but it's nice to sit down. Don't you like dancing?"

"I like dancing with you," he said.

A twinge of self-reproach went through her. "I meant to have saved ever so many more for you," she said. "But they went so fast—almost when I wasn't looking."

"I know," he said. "It isn't your fault that everybody wants you. It's difficult to say No, isn't it?"

"Oh, very!" she said, with a sigh.

"You'll have to learn to," he said unexpectedly, "or you'll get badly had one of these days. What would you do, for instance, if a fellow like Blakeley came along and wanted you to marry him?"

"Do? I don't know!" said Charmaine, aghast.

"And if you were too kind-hearted to say No to him," said Basil, "and then I came along and wanted you, what would happen then? Should I have to go away?"

"I don't know," she said helplessly.

He turned quietly towards her. "You know I do want you, don't you, Charmaine?" he said.

Her hand leapt in his. It had come.

For a second or two she sat beside him quite silent, almost rigid. Then, with a piteous, childlike movement of appeal, she bowed her head upon his arm, hiding her face. "Oh, don't!" she whispered. "Don't!"

He bent over her so that she could feel his breath upon her neck; but he did not attempt to hold her except for that close hand-clasp, which neither tightened nor relaxed.

"Mustn't I?" he said. "Is it so much too soon? I shouldn't have spoken now, only I've got to go away, and I couldn't bear the thought of losing you. I'll wait—I'll wait any length of time if you can only give me a little hope. Can't you, Charmaine? Can't you?"

There was a tremor in his voice as he spoke the last low words that somehow seemed to pierce her. Almost before she knew it, her other hand came up, enclosing his. But she did not lift her face.

"I'm not nearly—good enough," she told him haltingly.

"My dear!" he said. "You!"

"I'm not!" she declared, with growing vehemence, because of the tender mockery with which he received the declaration. "You don't know. You haven't got to marry. And I—I have."

Her head sank a little lower with the words, but her hands clung faster and ever faster to his.

"My dear!" he said. "What on earth do you mean by that?"

"Oh, it's very difficult," murmured Charmaine piteously. "But—but I'll try and tell you. You see, I'm not wanted at home, and so I've got to marry—if I possibly can—and get a home somewhere else."

She choked back a sob that caught her unawares. The humiliation of telling him was almost worse than anything she had ever known. It seemed to crush her to the earth. But yet not to have told him would have been unendurable.

He drew his hand away from hers and gathered her bodily into his arms.

"That means that you are mine, then, doesn't it?" he said. "It means that we need each other, little sweetheart, and if you don't love me yet, it's up to me to teach you."

"Oh, but I do!" she said impulsively, slipping her arms round his neck like a child. "I do love you. You're the kindest man I've ever met."

"I should be the happiest man alive at this moment," he said, "if you were brave enough to kiss me."

"Oh, must I?" said Charmaine, in renewed agitation.

He put up his hand and pressed her head gently down on to his shoulder. "No, darling," he said. "There is no 'must' about it. There never will be between you and me. Just remember that always!

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I love you, and I shall never want you to do anything against your will. You mustn't be afraid of me, Charmaine. I want your love—only your love—as you are able to give it."

"I do love you," she said again, half-awed and half-comforted by the gravity of his speech. "I wish I were something better—more like all the rest."

"Do you think I should want you if you were?" he said. He was stroking her head now very softly as it rested against him, and after a moment or two he rested his cheek against it, but not with any gesture of possession. "I don't think I shall ever manage to make you realize," he said, "how you have taken hold of me. The moment I saw you the other day—my fairy queen—kneeling over the flowers to kiss them, I knew that unless I could get you for my very own I should never be happy again. You didn't feel like that, I know. You don't even now. But, anyhow, you liked the look of me, didn't you? You weren't afraid of me—after the first, were you?"

"No," murmured Charmaine, beginning to relax almost unconsciously. "You were so kind."

"And you're not afraid of me now," he pursued very gently. "You're only a little startled because I've asked you to marry me so soon."

"I shouldn't have liked anyone else to ask me," she told him shyly.

"Thank God for that!" he said with feeling. "It almost sounds as if you have made up your mind to marry me. Have you?"

"If you're sure you want me to," said Charmaine, pressing her face close into his shoulder.

"I would marry you to-morrow if I could," he said.

"Why can't you?" said Charmaine.

He stirred. His hand sought her hidden face. "Do you really mean that?"

"Oh, yes, I think so," said Charmaine, beginning to tremble. "No one else could ask me then."

"No one else will ask you now," he said, tenderly overcoming her faint resistance and turning her head back upon his arm. "Don't be afraid, little sweetheart! You are mine, and no one is going to take you away."

There was in his voice such a wealth of protecting love that she found it impossible not to respond, even though the scared feeling still persisted at the back of her consciousness. Her arms were still wound about his neck as she lifted her lips to his. And he kissed her, not as Baba Blacksheep had kissed her, with a hot eagerness that would not be denied, but with a close and reverent steadfastness that would not take more than she was prepared to give and served to reassure and strengthen her.

When that first kiss was over and he gently let her go, it seemed to Charmaine that some mystic bond had been sealed between them, and that thereby her freedom had passed into his keeping.

CHAPTER X.

THE GIFT.

"POOR little thing!" said Lady Cravenstowe.

She stood by Charmaine's bed, across which the morning sunlight was streaming, and looked down at her with loving eyes which were not without a suggestion of tears.

Charmaine was asleep, her golden hair lying in two great plaits on her breast.

"If he could see her now!" murmured Lady Cravenstowe.

Charmaine stirred and made a movement of awaking.

"Dear child!" said Lady Cravenstowe aloud.

Charmaine's eyes opened and gazed at her, as it were through a haze of sleep. "That was a big wave!" she said.

Then they took in the motherly face above her, and smiled their recognition. The mists of slumber passed, and they shone like violets in the early dew.

"My darling!" said Lady Cravenstowe, and stooping gathered her up to her heart. "I know all about it. He has told me."

"Oh!" said Charmaine breathlessly, clinging to her. "I do hope you're not vexed. Really—truly—I couldn't help it!"

"Vexed! My darling, I'm delighted!" Lady Cravenstowe assured her, though her tears were no longer a suggestion but a reality. "It's the one thing I was hoping for; only I didn't think it could happen so soon. After you were in bed Basil called me into his room and told me everything. He was so happy he could hardly speak at first." She clasped Charmaine closer and tenderly kissed her. "God bless you both!" she said.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're pleased," said Charmaine with deep relief. "I felt as if I ought to have asked you first, because it was you who had me here."

Lady Cravenstowe laughed at her with tender ridicule. "You are such a darling! I don't believe you could be spoilt. But now, supposing you have your breakfast and get up! It's really selfish of me to sit here chatting. It's past eleven o'clock and Basil is waiting for you. I rather think he's got something to give you."

"Oh, has he?" said Charmaine, bewildered and rather overwhelmed. "Oughtn't

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I to go home to Sylvia first and tell her about it?"

"No, darling. I will take you this afternoon and tell her myself," said Lady Cravenstowe. "And then I shall persuade her to let you come back again with me, and we will all go down to Culverley at the end of the week and see poor Hugh. I am not going to let you out of my sight for a long while."

IT was a wonderful awakening for Charmaine; she hardly knew how to face it. She scarcely touched any breakfast in her excitement, and later found herself so shaky that it seemed as if her toilet would never be complete. But the advent of Lady Cravenstowe's maid to help her had a calming effect, and by the time a message reached her that her hostess would be pleased if she would come to her in the drawing-room when she was ready, she was much calmer.

When at length she went down to obey the summons a curious sense of fate had descended upon her, weighing her down with a strange oppression. It was as if in her desperate desire to escape from the bondage that lay behind her she had fled blindly into a cage possessing glittering bars.

She wondered as she entered the drawing-room if dear Lady Cravenstowe, who understood so much, could ever be made to comprehend this uneasy feeling of hers. But the half-formed hope died within her as she moved up the long room. For it did not contain Lady Cravenstowe.

A tall figure moved to meet her.

"Oh!" she said faintly.

He reached her, bent to her, took her trembling hands in his. "It's all right, darling," he said.

She looked up at him for a moment piteously, and then with reassurance; for there was nothing overwhelming about him, nothing even formidable.

"I'm sorry I'm so late," she said.

He bent a little lower and kissed her forehead. "It doesn't matter—so long as you come to me at last," he said. "Come along into the grotto! I've got something to show you."

As they entered the green nook with its tinkling fountain his arm was round her, but there was no restraint in its touch. She could have freed herself with a gesture.

"Happy?" he asked gently.

She squeezed his arm. "I'm ever so happy," she said, "and getting happier every minute."

He laughed a little. "What do you think I've been doing this morning while you were lying asleep?"

She glanced up at him shyly. "I don't know."

"Well, guess!" he said. "I've been shopping—buying something for you."

He pulled a little leathern case out of his pocket and opened it.

"Oh!" breathed Charmaine, dazzled. "How—beautiful!"

It was a simple half-hoop of very deep sapphires and diamonds.

"It's much—much—too lovely," said Charmaine. "I should be afraid to wear it."

"Let's try it on!" he suggested. "Give me that third finger of yours!"

She complied half-reluctantly. "I'd almost rather keep it in its case to look at," she murmured, as he slipped the ring on.

"We'll have a heavenly time together," he said. "And as for your stepsister, Griselda—well, she'll never have another chance to ill-treat you, that I promise you. We'll get married straight away, shall we? And then you'll belong to me."

"Oh, do let us!" said Charmaine.

The colour came back to her cheeks under his caresses and her distress vanished. The sense of security which he imparted to her made her feel so strangely happy that she hardly knew herself. And when he began to talk about Culverley and the plan he and Aunt Edith had formed of taking her down there for a few days to make the acquaintance of his cousin Hugh, who was Lord Conister and the head of the family, she was too completely swept away by his enthusiasm to be awed by the prospect.

The time sped by while they were together, and the luncheon-hour came upon them as a surprise. Charmaine's sparkling eyes and radiant face brought a fond smile to Lady Cravenstowe's kindly countenance. She herself was keenly enjoying the situation. No fairy godmother could have watched her plans mature with greater satisfaction. She was on the whole glad that circumstances pointed to an early marriage. It was so much better that Charmaine should run no risk of being spoilt beforehand by hosts of adorers.

"It won't matter afterwards," chuckled wily Lady Cravenstowe to herself. "They will only be able to adore from a distance, and she is sure to adore Basil when once she is married to him. It will have become a habit with her by the time she is grown up."

Happy philosophy, based as securely as that house upon the sand against which the rain beat and the winds blew!

CHAPTER XI.

CULVERLEY.

CULVERLEY!

Culverley on its hill on an afternoon of early summer, with its towers shining in the sunlight; and below, its

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beechwoods of exquisite green! To Charmaine it was the loveliest sight she had ever beheld.

"What a perfect place!" she said. "It's like—it's like Heaven!"

"It is rather," said Lady Cravenstowe.

"I thought you'd like it," said Basil.

She turned to him. "Oh, I do—I do! I never imagined anything half so beautiful."

As the open car which had met them at the station eight miles distant sped steadily upwards towards that wonderful castle that seemed to be perched in air, it was to Charmaine as if the dream which had so amazingly possessed her during the past week had turned at length into a permanent web of enchantment. In the reassuring presence of her *fiancé* she could no longer feel scared, though the prospect of being presented to Lord Conister still filled her with a certain awe.

She had only that morning received a brief letter from Griselda, containing formal felicitations upon her engagement, to which her father had already given his unqualified consent; and that letter had done more to make her realize her emancipation than anything else. And yet even now there sometimes came to her a feeling as of being on a wrong road, a vague sense of unrest, almost of trespass.

But these perplexities were not troubling her now. Culverley filled her whole mind for the moment, and as they wound through the stately park up to the ancient ivy-clad gateway she could only gaze in wondering silence; for she had no words.

"This is only the north side," said Basil. "To see the old place at its best you must come through to the south front. I dare say we shall find old Hugh there too."

The car had stopped and Lady Cravenstowe was descending. Charmaine followed, and they entered through a great arched doorway and found themselves in a high hall, oak-panelled, and hung with dim old pictures.

A white-haired butler gave them ceremonious greeting. "His lordship is on the south terrace, my lady. Would you be pleased to go through the library?"

"Thank you, Willis," said Lady Cravenstowe, following him to a door of gleaming black oak which he threw open before her. "Come along, my dear! How is his lordship, Willis?"

"Not very well to-day, my lady, I am sorry to say," replied the decorous butler.

Lady Cravenstowe led the way into a large apartment filled with bookcases and comfortable leathern furniture, possessing western windows as well as the French ones at the end which stood open to the south terrace.

"This is where he spends a good deal of his time," said Basil, "and we get through all the indoor business of the estate here."

"What a lovely, sunny room!" said Charmaine.

She wished that Lady Cravenstowe would have paused a moment to give her time to collect herself, but she was already halfway across it. She had no choice but to follow.

"It's all right," said Basil in a humorous undertone. "Just as well to get it over quickly!"

His hand still held her arm with a reassuring pressure as they reached the wide-flung windows.

"Don't miss the view!" he said. "You'll never see it for the first time again."

"Oh!" said Charmaine. "It doesn't seem real."

He laughed at her tenderly. "What! Too good to be true? That's what I sometimes think of you, my fairy queen."

"Oh, no!" said Charmaine, flushing.

Perhaps that was what he had angled for, for he drew her forward immediately while her face was still the colour of a blush-rose; and so, half-laughing, half-protesting, she had her first glimpse of the head of the family.

HE was lying in a long wheeled chair, his head and shoulders propped by pillows—a man who must once have been of commanding stature and imposing mien. But what struck her most about him now was his greyness. Hair, face, and long, thin hands were all grey. Even his brows, which were inclined to be heavy, were grey, and the eyes below them were like Basil's, only more steely and piercing in their regard. His features were handsome in outline, but drawn and lined by suffering. Nevertheless, there was about him a dignity and reserve which made even a glance of pity seem an outrage.

He stretched out a hand to her as she drew near, and his keen eyes smiled a greeting while they searchingly surveyed her.

"So this is—my cousin Charmaine!" he said.

She gave him her hand in nervous trepidation. "Thank you very much—for calling me that," she said.

The grimness of his clean-shaven mouth relaxed as he offered his other hand to Basil.

"Hullo, old chap!" he said. "My best congratulations to you both!"

"Thank you very much, old man," said Basil. "I knew you'd be pleased."

"Oh, yes, I am very pleased," Lord Conister said, his eyes still upon Charmaine. "I wish you both every happiness. It was good of you to bring her to see me so soon,

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and good of you," he pressed her hand kindly, "to come."

"I loved coming," said Charmaine simply. "And I love it more than ever now that I'm here. It is so very, very beautiful."

"It appeals to you, does it?" he said, and his tone was gentle and friendly. "You feel it is the sort of place that you could come to regard as home?"

His hand had released hers, and she clasped her own together in that involuntary gesture of hers which was so much more eloquent than words. "Only I don't feel nearly great enough. Don't you think Basil really ought to marry somebody—somebody important?"

Lord Conister uttered a brief laugh. "Only he won't, my dear," he said. "So you had better dismiss the idea, as I have. And I see no reason to fear that the family honour will not be as safe in your hands as in anyone else's. Yes, that's right, Basil! Make her sit down! And you, too, Aunt Edith! Tea is just coming."

It was all infinitely easier than Charmaine had expected. Almost before she had realized it, she was sitting beside Lord Conister's chair and telling him of the wonders of her brief season in London. She did not even notice until afterwards that Aunt Edith and Basil were drawn a little apart, leaving her to converse practically alone with her host.

They talked of many things, and he told her quite naturally of the accident that had made him a cripple for life.

"Unfortunately, it means that I am quite dependent upon other people," he said. "And that is why Basil has given up everything to come and look after the estate. I should have rather hesitated to let him do so if I had not felt that it could not possibly be very long before it became his own."

"I am sure he was glad to be of use to you," said Charmaine.

"Yes." Lord Conister spoke meditatively. "I think he was. But all the same, I have no desire to hold him back from all the pleasures of life. And the old place needs a mistress as well as a competent master." He smiled at her. "I have thought so for some time," he said. "And I am glad that he realizes it too."

At this point Aunt Edith seemed suddenly to awaken to the fact that Charmaine was her own particular care, and she turned from the tea-table and cheerily broke in upon them.

"Now, Hugh, she is not to be drawn in like this within half an hour of her arrival. You can tell her all about Culverley in due course—not forgetting the wonderful branch-line to Bentbridge, which I am thankful to observe is burrowing too deeply into the earth to be visible from here. But she is coming with me now to take off her things, and afterwards I shall hand her over to Basil to be shown all round. Come along, dear, and leave them to have a talk! They've plenty to say to each other."

She drew Charmaine away with the words, and as soon as they were alone she kissed her. "There! I knew it!" she said. "You've made another conquest."

CHAPTER XII.

LORD CONISTER.

"AND the verdict?" said Basil.

He spoke lightly, but the question was not without a hint of anxiety that moved his cousin to touch his arm with a sympathetic hand.

"My dear chap," he said gently, "she is exquisite, of course. But—how young! I think you would be wise to wait a little. How old is the child? Surely not seventeen?"

"Yes, she was seventeen last November, and she has no more desire to wait than I have. In fact, there's every reason why we shouldn't wait; for she is miserable at home. They don't seem to understand her or have any use for her there. So we are going to get married at once. Good old Aunt Edith has promised to see it through before she goes to Baden."

"As soon as that?" said Lord Conister. "But you've got to do something besides make her happy, Basil. You've got to make her realize the tremendous responsibility that will be hers when she takes the name of Conister. You have got to make sure—quite sure—that she will always be worthy of that name, so that your son may grow up worthy too."

He spoke with great solemnity.

"Yes, old man. I know. I've thought of all that. And there again I think my choice is justified. She is everything that is pure and innocent and unspoilt. It's up to me to keep her so, isn't it? And the very fact that she is so young ought to make it easier. She is impressionable, as you see, and very responsive. She will learn to guard the family honour just as you and I do."

"You haven't been into her antecedents at all?" questioned Lord Conister.

Basil faced him squarely. "Not at all, old chap. I can't see that they matter. Charmaine is everything to me and all I want. I never imagined that anything like this could happen to me, and now that it has happened—well, nothing else counts, that's all."

"I see," said Lord Conister. "Well, if you are quite sure of her——"

"I am," said Basil.

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"And quite sure——" he spoke impressively—"that she realizes what she is doing——"

"She does," said Basil.

"Then you may perhaps go ahead with safety," Lord Conister said.

They began to smoke, and he turned the conversation. The matter of the branch-line railway that was being cut through an outlying portion of the park was engrossing him very deeply.

"Everything seems to go wrong when you're not here," he said, when they had discussed the subject at some length. "And yet it's a shame to monopolize all your time like this. It's in your own interests, that's my only comfort."

"Don't talk rot!" said Basil. "I'm very fond of Culverley, but I'd do anything for you too, and you know it. How have you been standing this warm spell? You're not looking too fit."

His cousin did not reply for a moment; then: "It's just the process of gradual decay, Basil," he said. "A slow crumbling of strength! It's always going on. Nothing hinders or hastens it. I am never better."

"Old man, don't!" urged Basil in a low voice. "I'm too fond of you. I can't stand it."

"It'll get easier," said Lord Conister in the same quiet voice, "easier for us both. You know, I thought I couldn't stand it

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once, but it's curious how ideas change. I feel now that all I want is to see an heir born to this house before I go out."

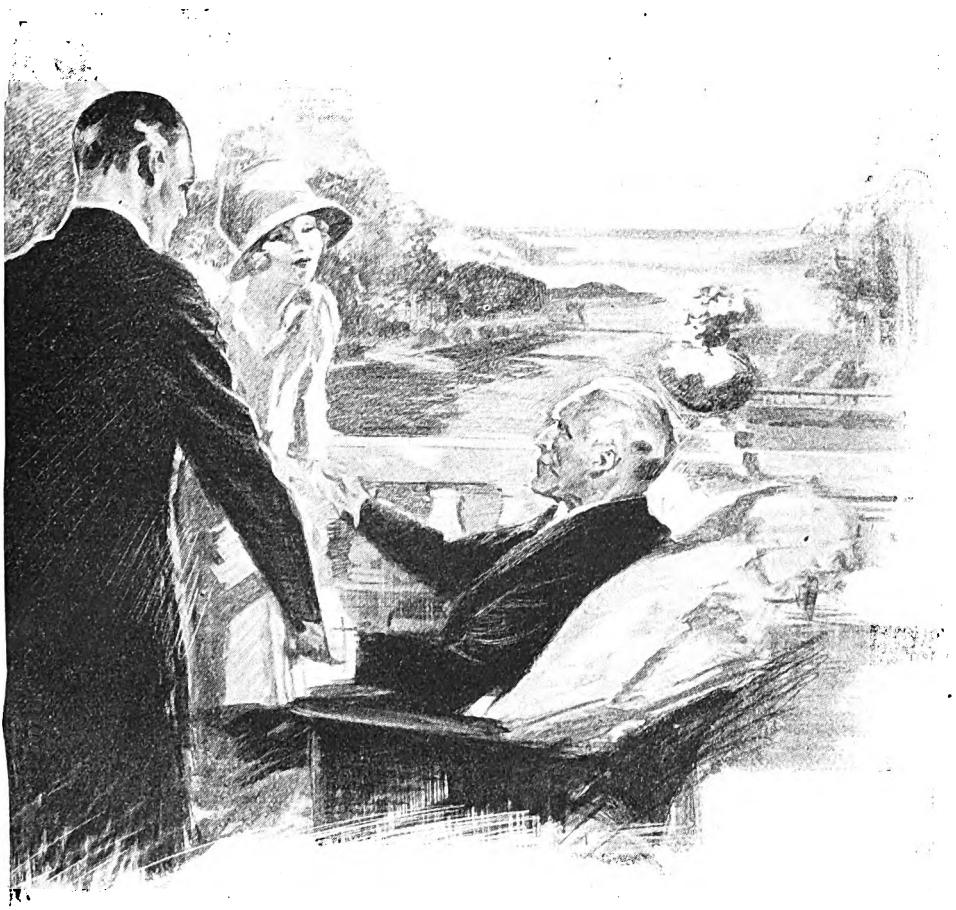
"You ought to have had a son of your own," Basil said, deeply moved.

"Yes, I suppose I ought. At least, I used to think so. But I'm not sorry on the whole that things are—as they are. If I had married I should have left my son a minor, and my wife——" He paused a moment, adding finally, "Well, the woman I could have married once is now another man's wife, so it is reasonable to suppose she would have married again. And that would not have been very good for Culverley."

"One never knows," said Basil vaguely.

"No. One never knows," Lord Conister said. "I loved her, but she was not in love with me, though she would have married me for my position. I knew that at the time, yet I thought I could win her. And I should have won her if it hadn't been for a family disgrace which smirched her name. That made me hesitate, on account of my own family honour. And so I lost her. It was best, of course. It was far best. And, as I say, she is married now—I believe happily married. Yet—I have often wondered——

"And now you go to your little sweetheart and make her happy! And be sure you win her, old boy, be sure you win her—before any other fellow—comes along!"



Lord Conister stretched out a hand to her, and his keen eyes smiled a greeting while they searchingly surveyed her.

His eyes drooped and closed. Basil, leaning over him, thought that an even greyer shade had overspread the grey features. Yet, as he watched, he saw that the breathing was normal and effortless, and, somewhat reassured, he stood up.

"All right, Hugh, boy, I'll leave you for

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a bit. I know you like to be alone. I'll tell Jeffreys to be at hand."

"Thanks," said Lord Conister, without opening his eyes. "And you go, dear fellow, go and enjoy yourself—with little Charmaine!"

CHAPTER XIII.

COURTSHIP.

THAT evening was the happiest that Charmaine had ever known. It was spent in wandering all over the old castle of Culverley with Basil. Its massive antiquity impressed her more and more, appealing to a deep sense of romance within her.

"It must have belonged to a knight of the Round Table once," she said.

"I dare say some bits of it did," said Basil. "But, anyhow, it's been improved upon since. I'm vandal enough to prefer the more modern part. You haven't seen that yet, have you?"

"Yes, my room is on that side," she told him. "It looks straight over to the sea. Such a beautiful view!"

"Oh, they've given you my lady's chamber, have they?" he said. "That was Hugh's doing, I'll be bound. Well, that's the room that will always be yours, sweetheart. I'm glad you like it."

"Oh!" she murmured in confusion. "I didn't know."

"It's the room Hugh was born in," he said. "His mother always loved it. If he had married, it would have belonged to his wife. As it is, it will belong to you."

She stood up in the dim turret-room and looked about her. "I can't realize it somehow," she said. "I can't understand Culverley coming to me. I've nothing to give for it all."

"My dear," he said, "don't ever be troubled about having nothing to give! You are giving yourself. And presently—presently, it may be you will be giving even more than yourself. Have you thought of that?"

She quivered a little, but waited in silence.

He pointed to the window and to the rolling lands that lay spread below. "Have you thought of what will become of all this when Hugh and I have both gone on—as we both must some day? Where will it all go to—the old name, the lands, the cherished family honour? Shall I tell you, little sweetheart? You won't be frightened, will you? I know you won't. It will go to—our son!"

He spoke into her ear, for her face was swiftly hidden from him, pressed closely into his shoulder. She said nothing, but he felt her slight body quiver.

He laid his hand very tenderly upon her head. "That is what you will be able to give, my little sweetheart, though you are not to think that it's for that that I want you so. Only, I do want that too. And so will you want it, my darling, when we are married."

She remained motionless in his hold for a few moments; then very suddenly she lifted her face to his. "Oh, Basil," she said tremulously, "I do hope—I sha'n't disappoint you."

"As if you could!" he said. "Dearest, as if you possibly could!"

"When—when we're married——" she tripped a little over the words, and he laughed—"I shall try to be extra good, because I shall have such a high standard to live up to."

"When we are married!" he repeated softly. "I love hearing you say that. Say it again!"

She shook her head in sudden shyness. "Shall we go down?" she said. "I want to see the Lovers' Pool that you were telling me of, that is lovelier than Aunt Edith's grotto."

"Will you say it for me when we get there?" he urged, yielding to her as he always yielded with the gentleness that was surely if very gradually winning her to him.

"Perhaps," said Charmaine, but some strange elusive mood was upon her and she would not linger any further in his hold. "I want to get out into the sun, don't you?"

"Come along, then!" he said. "We'll just have time for the Lovers' Pool before dinner."

She went with him light-footed, and they crossed a corner of the gardens and passed through a rosery massed with flowers to a small gate that led out into the greenness of the park. Then, under spreading beech trees all newly clad in bright spring foliage, they made their way by a narrow beaten path that sloped rapidly downhill to a tiny glen with a murmuring stream. The stream ran crystal-clear over its brown stones, and as they followed it they came upon a rustic bridge across.

"This takes us to the island," Basil said. "The Lovers' Pool is just beyond."

"Oh, this is fairyland!" said Charmaine.

But when they had crossed the bridge and mounted a slight rise that brought them to a curious little stone building that looked like a temple, she gasped in sheer astonishment and delight. For there below her, spread like a glass in which everything within reach was faultlessly reproduced in flawless reflection, lay a wide pool of deep clear water, its surface of glistening silver faintly tinged with rose in the evening light, its depths of purest, most translucent blue

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—a magic lake indeed, and the fairest thing that she had yet beheld.

"How lovely!" she said. "How lovely!"

"We'll swim here together," he said, "shall we?" Then, as she hesitated, "Well, when we're married, then!"

"Perhaps," said Charmaine, the soft flush rising in her cheeks.

"Little girl, you aren't afraid of being married?" he said coaxingly. "Look at me—look at me, and tell me!"

She turned her eyes upon him with an obvious effort. "I am—a little afraid—sometimes," she confessed.

"Ah, don't be!" he said. "Be happy with me, darling! I'll never do anything to make you unhappy. If you only knew how I am longing to have you for my very own—simply to make you happy! Couldn't we fix a date here, on our first evening at Culverley? It would be nice to look back upon afterwards, wouldn't it?"

She turned slightly from him. "I don't know," she said, in a small scared voice.

"Will nothing ever make you love me?" he said.

"Oh!" She almost cried out in her distress. "But I do—I do! Don't you know I do?"

His look was grave, but it held no sternness. "I think you are fond of me, yes," he said. "But you don't love me enough to trust yourself to me."

"Oh, it isn't that—it isn't that!" she told him quiveringly. "It's something else—something that seems to be holding me back, even when I want to go on! I knew I could never make you understand."

Her agitation moved him; he pressed her to his side. "I think perhaps I understand better than you do, darling," he said. "And if you could only trust me, I believe I could make it easier for you. Won't you try to trust me, Charmaine?"

"Yes," she whispered faintly. "Yes."

"Then can't we get married within the next few weeks," he said, "and come and settle quietly here with Hugh? He needs us badly enough. It's too heavy a burden for him alone."

"Yes," said Charmaine again.

"You don't want to go back to your father and sister to live, do you?"

"Oh, no!" she said, horrified at the bare idea. "Please no!"

"And Aunt Edith wants to go to Baden at the end of July, though she has promised to stay and take care of Hugh till we come back from our honeymoon," he pursued. "So it seems to me that delay is out of the question. Don't you think we might fix a date, darling? Or shall I fix it for you? Well, here goes, then! We'll be married three weeks from now! And I'll go and see your father and bring him into line."

"Oh, and Griselda too!" she said quickly. "You'll have to be very nice to her."

"All right," he promised. "I will be very nice to everyone. That's settled, then, isn't it? Now—are you very terrified?"

Her eyes smiled up at him with reassurance. "No. I feel better. But may I ask one thing of you, Basil? Just one thing! It will make such a difference to me—all the difference in the world."

"What on earth is it?" he said in surprise. "Of course I will do it—willingly, gladly—whatever it is."

"It's just this. Mrs. Dicker—I've told you about Mrs. Dicker—I want her dreadfully. May I have her? Would you mind—if she came and lived with us—when we are married? She's a *very* good cook."

"My darling!" he said. "You can have fifty Mrs. Dickers if you want them. Of course you shall have her! Why not?"

She nestled against him. "Oh, thank you, Basil—dear Basil! But I don't know how I shall ever get her, because I shall have to ask Griselda, and she's sure to say No. She always does."

"I must really meet Griselda," said Basil. "When are we going there? Next week-end? You'd better write and fix it up."

"We needn't do that," said Charmaine, shrinking a little. "They're coming up to town. Sylvia is arranging it. And she did say the wedding might be from her flat, so if it's really going to be so soon, perhaps I needn't go home at all."

"Don't you want to go home?" he said. "Haven't you anything you want to see to—no treasures to pack up?"

"Oh, no! There's nothing I want—except Mrs. Dicker. And you really do think I shall get her?" she asked wistfully.

"My dear child," Basil said, "if you want her, write and tell her so! She's a free agent. If she wants to come, she'll come."

"Oh, I know she'll want to. She always said she wouldn't stay on without me. And she's an excellent housekeeper too," said Charmaine. "It's only—it's only—if Griselda is vexed!" Her voice sank.

"Well, let her be vexed! What's it matter?" said Basil; then, feeling her tremble, "Oh, it does matter, does it? Well, then, write to Mrs. Dicker and tell her to give notice as soon as we are married! I can take on Griselda for you then."

"Oh, would you?" she said, relieved. "That would be good of you." She turned with one of her rare impulsive gestures and clung to him. "Oh, Basil, I do think you're good. I shall be very glad when we're married," she said.

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He laughed a little, holding her. "Shall you really, sweetheart? Quite sure?"

She moved and raised her pure eyes to his with unflinching confidence. "Yes, I am quite sure now," she said.

And as her lips returned his kiss, it came to him that he had really begun to win her at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FAMILY HONOUR.

CHARMAINE did not see Lord Conister again that evening, for he spent it in his own apartments, too tired for further talk. He sent her a courteous message of excuse which was delivered by Aunt Edith, and when dinner was over they sat out on the terrace and discussed arrangements for the impending marriage until it seemed to Charmaine that dreaming really must be over and reality had begun. She went to bed at length in the room which was soon to be her own and lay in a kind of maze of wonder until sleep finally closed her eyes and she sank into a deep slumber, never stirring until the morning sunlight was streaming in upon her.

Then for a while she lay marvelling at the amazing situation in which she found herself till she could remain still no longer, and slipping out of bed went to the window. In the hazy distance she caught a glimpse of another house embowered in trees which seemed to have sprung up in the night, for she did not remember noticing it before.

As she sauntered upon the terrace after breakfast with Basil, she asked him about the distant house.

Charmaine gasped in sheer astonishment. For there below her lay a wide pool of deep, clear water, its surface of glistening silver faintly tinged with rose in the evening light.

"It looks such a lovely place," she said. "All massed in trees; but I can't see it from anywhere else."

"Oh, that's Starfields," he said. "It's changed hands a good many times of late years. I really don't know who's got it now. You'd better ask Hugh. Look here! Will you think me an awful brute if I potter off to church with Aunt Edith and leave you behind? I know old Hugh would like to have you to himself for a bit, and as you've got to be off again to-morrow on this trousseau business—Great Scott!" He broke off, half-laughing. "If it were for anything else, I don't think I could bear it. Anyhow, I shall be dashing up next week-end to see your father and sister in town—and, incidentally, you too."

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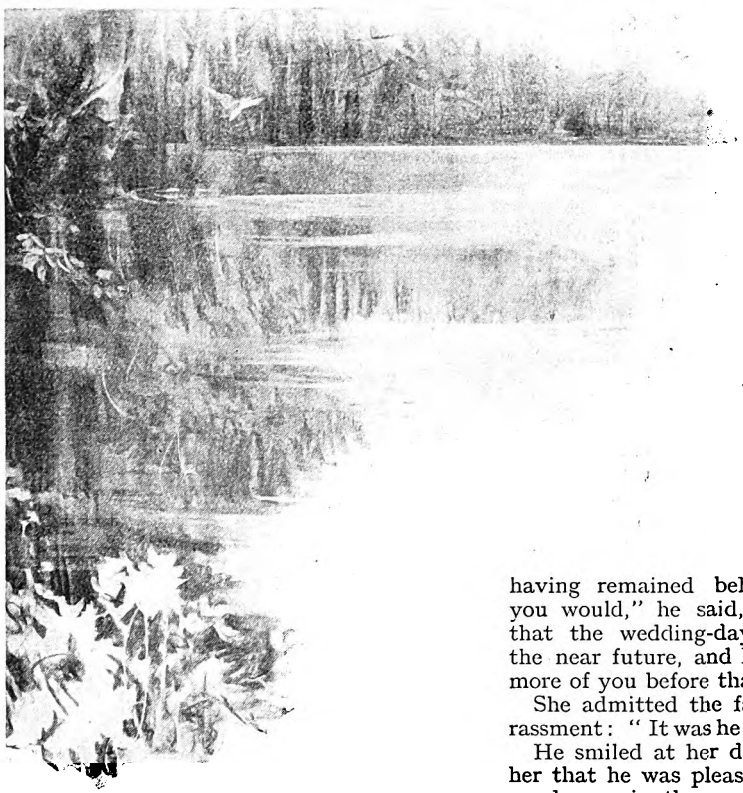

Charmaine brightened also. "Oh, yes. It won't seem so very long, will it? And perhaps, if the trousseau doesn't take too long, Lord Conister might have me down here again for the week-end after—before we get married, I mean." She flushed at her own presumption in suggesting such a thing. "Do you think he'd mind?"

"Mind!" Basil laughed aloud. "Well, you ask him, that's all!"

"Oh, I couldn't!" she said.

"Yes, yes," he insisted, "you are to. He'll be absolutely delighted, take my word for it!"

She saw that she was committed to make the proposal and would have been overwhelmed by shyness but for his repeated assurances that it would be a welcome one. It meant that there would be no time for a return to her own home before her marriage, and this was exactly what Charmaine in her inmost trembling heart desired to accomplish.

It was in a somewhat wistful frame of mind that she watched Basil and his aunt depart across the park by the footpath that led to Bentbridge. She would greatly have preferred to accompany them, for the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* of some duration with Lord Conister was one that filled her with awe, in spite of his kindness on the previous day, and when after a brief interval she saw him wheeled forth through the library window to his favourite corner of the terrace she would have given much to have fled away.

He saw her, however, and motioned her to him.

Then, when she was seated, he thanked her courteously for having remained behind. "I hoped that you would," he said, "for Basil tells me that the wedding-day has been fixed for the near future, and I want to see a little more of you before that arrives."

She admitted the fact with some embarrassment: "It was he who fixed it—not me."

He smiled at her disclaimer, and assured her that he was pleased. "So long as you are happy in the matter, I am more than satisfied," he said. "I don't want you to be hurried unduly, that's all."

"Oh, I know," said Charmaine, "I know, and that is so kind of you. But I'm quite ready to be married, only I feel so inexperienced, and so unworthy."

He smiled at her again. "Unworthiness and inexperience don't necessarily go hand in hand," he said. "But it is true that in marrying Basil you are entering upon a very high estate, for there has never yet been any blot upon the name of Conister, and it will become your responsibility as well as his to keep it untarnished. I want you to realize, Charmaine, that our family honour is a very precious thing—far more precious than rank or power or lands—and it has been handed down and jealously guarded from generation to generation." He uttered a deep sigh. "There are a great many responsibilities attached to a great name," he said. "The question of heredity, for instance, is one which needs to be very carefully considered. It is one of far more importance, in my opinion, than that of mere personal inclination. I sacrificed my own to it long ago."

"Oh, did you?" said Charmaine with quick sympathy.

"Yes." He spoke with his eyes fixed straight before him; they had a set, almost

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a stony look. "But for that I should have married the girl I loved, and there would have been a direct heir to succeed me. She was a wonderful girl. She would have carried all before her. And I had won her—I had actually won her—when it happened. Ah, well, it was better to let her go. It would never have done—the daughter of a felon—a criminal suicide——" He paused again, his grey face contracted as if by physical pain; then: "It was hard on her, poor girl! She was full of pride and very honourable herself, and she felt it—bitterly—bitterly. I sometimes wonder if I should have done better to have stood by her—married her—but there would always have been the danger—the possible taint in the blood." He checked himself abruptly, and resumed in a different tone. "Have you seen everything now? Or are there any questions you would like to ask me?"

"Oh, yes," said Charmaine, "there is Starfields! Basil said you would tell me about it. It looks such a lovely place in the distance. I can see it from my window. I suppose it is the nearest house to Culverley."

"Starfields!" He frowned slightly. "Strange that you should ask me that! That is where she used to live." Again he checked himself. "But that all happened years ago. It has changed hands several times since. The people who have it now are Irish. But I don't know them. I am afraid I am past calling upon anyone now. I must get Basil to do so. I have to concentrate all my strength upon setting my house in order."

"Am I tiring you?" asked Charmaine shyly. "Would you like me to go?"

"No, no!" he said. "Stay and talk to me, child! Tell me of all the things that interest you! There must be a great many—at your age."

She hesitated. Finally: "I can't think of anything but Culverley and getting married," she confessed in some confusion. "I feel as if—as if I ought to be learning all the time. I mean to do my very best"—she spoke pathetically—"but I expect I shall make heaps of mistakes."

"I don't think you will, my dear," he said very kindly. "I think you will succeed. You are very young now, and you will still be very young when you become Lady Conister. But if you will remember always—if ever you should be tempted to do anything unworthy of the name—that through many centuries men have been willing to die rather than suffer it to be discredited, you will be ready to sacrifice yourself upon the altar of honour sooner than bring shame upon it—and you will teach your children the same."

Impetuously she stretched out her hand to him, feeling that her response must be instant and absolute. "Oh, I will!" she said with a fervour that brought the tears to her eyes. "I will indeed. And I promise you—I promise—that I will never do anything to bring shame upon it. I will guard it always—as you would yourself."

"Will you?" he said. His long fingers closed with an extraordinary tenacity upon her own, so that she had a fleeting fancy as of being caught in a steel trap. "Charmaine—child, will you think it very unusual of me if I ask you to say after that—'So help me, God'? Then I shall know—I shall always know—that you will keep your word."

"I will—of course I will," she said, "if you wish it."

"Say it, then!" he said, his hand still imprisoning hers. "Say it!"

She closed her eyes with a childish thought that this was a prayer, and she fancied in that moment that a hush fell upon the terrace garden, making it a holy place, and that the old grim walls stood waiting for her to speak.

Simply and with reverence she did so, finding the words without effort, almost as though he prompted them. "I will always guard and defend the family honour of Conister to the utmost of my power—so help me, God!"

And as she bowed her head upon that most solemn vow, she heard him say: "God bless you!"

CHAPTER XV.

FLYING COLOURS.

WHEN Lady Cravenstowe and Basil returned from church they found Charmaine still sitting beside Lord Conister with a species of shy assurance in her demeanour which filled Aunt Edith with delight.

"Well, well!" she said, dropping into the chair which Charmaine hastened to vacate. "I hope you two have had a good gossip. It seems to have borne satisfactory fruit, anyway. You are beginning to look almost at home, child."

"I hope she is beginning to feel it," Lord Conister said. "She has promised to come again in a fortnight and stay until the day before her marriage. We must try and brush the old place up a bit, Basil, and make it fit for a bride."

"Rather!" said Basil. "I shall be here on and off for the next fortnight, and we'll get it spick and span. Aunt Edith and I were talking about it only just now. You're going to help, aren't you?" he appealed to her.

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"Of course!" said Aunt Edith. "As soon as I have found out exactly what Charmaine likes, I can start. And we will get it finished off while you are on your honeymoon." She beamed upon Lord Conister. "You're not to worry yourself, my dear Hugh. I shall be here all the time, and I will help you see to things."

"Thank you," he said. "That is so like you, but you mustn't tire yourself out."

"No, no," Basil said. "We are going to be satisfied with a short honeymoon, aren't we, Charmaine? And then we shall come back and settle down here and enjoy ourselves. We can go again later when Aunt Edith has had her cure and Hugh can spare us. And now come along and see the stables! We shall just have time before lunch, and afterwards I want to take you out for a spin. Yes, old fellow, we'll be back for tea." He turned to his cousin. "I haven't forgotten. We'll go all round and look at the cutting and the tunnel as soon as it's cool. Much better to get it over to-day without Busby hanging round. I'll wheel you round myself and we'll talk it all out."

"It's very good of you to spare the time," said Lord Conister. "Are you sure you'll be able to do without him for a little while, Charmaine?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I'd love to do a little exploring by myself if Aunt Edith doesn't want me. It's such fun finding one's own way about."

Her radiant face as they departed upon the afternoon's excursion testified that she had never before felt so confidently happy. Basil was full of tenderness and consideration for her. He would have been supremely happy also, for he was nearer to attaining that upon which he had set his heart than he had ever been; but his content was marred by anxiety regarding his cousin.

"I'm very troubled about the old chap," he told her. "I've only been away from him about ten days, and I can see a change in him—a decided change. He admits it himself, that's the worst of it. And there is nothing to be done. There never has been. It was a fatal injury from the first. We knew it could only be a question of time." He heaved a sigh. "I can't picture the place without him. Thank God I shall have you!"

His tone stirred her; she laid her hand upon his knee. "We shall have each other," she said softly.

His expression changed, the gloom lightened magically. "Bless you for that, my darling!" he said.

When they returned from their drive, Lady Cravenstowe thought she had never seen her *protégée* look so radiantly happy, and again she congratulated herself upon the success of her plans.

"You needn't be anxious," she murmured to Lord Conister. "She is beginning to adore him already. And indeed she wouldn't be human if she didn't. You are satisfied, surely?"

The grey face smiled, but the grey eyes held no mirth. "That is hardly the word I should use," Lord Conister said quietly. "I think it is a good beginning—in some ways almost too good. But—I shall not see the end."

"Ah, now, Hugh!" she protested.

His look went beyond her. Basil and Charmaine were drawing near.

"We will hope for a happy ending," he said gently.

And it seemed to Aunt Edith, watching him, that there was something prophetic in his expression, as though in that moment he saw that which it was not given to her to see. But even as she watched it faded, and only the shadow of a great weariness remained.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVERS' POOL.

AT Lord Conister's suggestion Charmaine walked beside his chair when Basil wheeled him across the park to the scene of the new railway operations. This was nearly a mile from the house, and the path by which they approached it was a somewhat rough one through the woods.

"It isn't going to be nearly as bad as I thought it would be," Basil said, as he stood surveying the scene with its heaps of stones and earth below him. "It may interfere a little with the coverts, but not seriously. I don't suppose the partridges will mind."

"That's another point," said his cousin in his rather tired voice. "There is no getting away from the fact that the line will divide up the shooting. You may be right about the birds, but ought I to construct a bridge for the benefit of the sportsmen? It's a long way round, you know."

"Oh, man alive, no!" Basil said. "Do you mean to tell me that we couldn't scramble down one bank and up the other without breaking our hearts? I shouldn't dream of a bridge just for that. It would be absurd. Put a couple of small gates each side in the railings! That's all we shall need. It's only a single line, remember, and if we can't manage to cross that in safety we'd better go back to the nursery, that's all. Don't you agree, Charmaine?"

She was standing on the verge of the excavation, looking downwards. At Basil's

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sudden question she started a little and drew sharply back.

"What! Giddy?" he said.

"Oh, no!" She laughed and coloured. "I was only thinking—how desolate it was."

"You run away, my dear!" said Lord Conister kindly. "We sha'n't be very long. But you won't enjoy this. It's ugly, isn't it? I'm sure you think so. You take a little turn through the park and go back to Aunt Edith!"

She accepted the suggestion gladly, for it was true that the desolation of the place seen thus for the first time had a depressing effect upon her.

"Yes, you go, dear!" said Basil. "You're looking tired. See, I'll walk with you to the end of the wood and put you on your way."

She protested at this, but was glad that he would not listen, for a strange uneasiness that was almost of the nature of a foreboding of evil possessed her. Now that Basil mentioned it, she realized that she was tired after the crowding experiences of the day, and she wished that she had not left Aunt Edith.

Nevertheless, she would not let him linger with her when they reached the edge of the wood. "You must go back," she said. "Hugh is wanting you. I can easily run home alone. That's the way, isn't it?"

"Yes, darling, straight across that long slope, and if you keep to the right of those trees in the distance you'll come to the Lovers' Pool."

"Oh, I'd like to go back by that," she said eagerly. "I do love that little island with the temple. Good-bye, dear Basil! You really must go back to Hugh."

"I shall be back in an hour," he said, as she moved away from him. "Don't let Pan or anybody spirit you away!"

Her laugh came back to him as she went—a soft, half-wistful laugh. "Nobody wants to do that," she said. "And they couldn't if they did. It's too late now."

Too late! Why did those words suddenly smite him like a warning?

It was a pleasant path that Charmaine followed across the green sward of the park, and the warmth of the evening sunshine that flooded the world drove the chill from her heart. She trod the springy turf like a nymph emerging from her glade to sport in the light of the sunset. All cares and oppressions were gone from her. It was a crystal hour of sparkling and almost intoxicating happiness.

There was plenty to interest her as she went. Rabbits were popping in and out of their burrows with as little concern as if she had been one of them. And she thought of Alice in Wonderland, which Mrs. Dicker had read to her five years before during her illness, and wished she could make herself an appropriate size to pay them a visit on terms of equality.

She reached the drive and crossed it, tripping with careless feet. She was drawing near to the Lovers' Pool. Why had they called it that? Did all the lovers of Culverley meet there? Or was it a single pair who had become historic? She must ask Aunt Edith about it. But the spot was lovely enough for any generation to frequent. One did not need to be romantic to enjoy its beauty.

She entered the shade of the tall beech trees, but she felt no chill here. The shimmering sunlight went with her. It lay in bright patches all around. There was nothing but warmth and colour to greet her whichever way she turned. Her feet seemed to grow lighter as she ascended. She did not feel the effort of climbing. It was as if she moved on wings, as if—almost as if—some unseen influence were drawing her. When she reached the top of the rise and looked down upon that enchanted pool, she thought she would see the fairies dancing.

Stay! What was that? A clear, flute-like whistle resounding through the wood! The silvery note thrilled through her. Was it—was it Pan, hiding behind one of those smooth grey trunks, spying upon her, mocking her?

Afterwards—long afterwards—she told herself that it was no mere chance that drew her to that fairy-haunted place, no fragrance of spring that filled her veins with the wild joy of life. The allurement indeed was there and the fragrance also. Doubtless too the spring was in her blood. For she was young and just beginning to know the amazing goodness of youth. But it was not by these that her feet were led. It was by something more potent, more irresistible still—Fate, or that greater thing called Love which beckons and eludes.

Again she heard that clear whistle; and now she was running, fleetly, eagerly, seeming to skim the ground. The grey trunks slid past her. She neared the summit. What was it of which that whistle reminded her? She had heard it before—somewhere, somewhere far back in the early days of life. But where? And when?

Ah! It began to dawn upon her. Somewhere below Glasmore, somewhere near the Malahide Breakwater, she had heard a whistle—clear and flute-like, such as this. Then as now it had called her. Then—as now—she had answered. The memory cut clean through her like a knife. She felt again the salt wind in her face, heard the rushing and breaking of great waters—knew

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by some shattering instinct that pierced to the very heart of her that here was the crisis for which unconsciously yet persistently she had waited all the intervening years.

There are some occasions in our lives—mercifully few, or the human frame would fail before its time—when Fate descends like a battering-ram upon our frail fortress of habit and convention which had seemed so secure and scatters it broadcast to every wind that blows. Thus was it now with Charmaine. It came upon her with overwhelming suddenness, so that she had not a moment's preparation or chance to flee had she dreamed of flight, and ere she knew it all her defences were swept away, and she was left helpless and undefended and alone.

But none of this was in her mind as she reached the summit of the hill, where the trees parted to the sky, and below her spread the Lovers' Pool viewed from the opposite side to that which she had visited with Basil the day before—a jewel in a perfect setting, blue as the sky above—a place for dreams.

In the hazy distance Charmaine caught a glimpse of another house embowered in trees.

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She saw the little temple on its island, its curved steps leading down to the water's edge—not a hundred yards away from her, with the clear blue water between. She saw the rustic arched bridge that led thither out of the green depths of the surrounding wood. And even as her eyes for one moment of eager search dwelt upon it, she saw three tiny fountains rise one after another from the glassy surface of the water beneath it from a skimming stone deftly thrown from the other side.

Without an instant's pause, she ran down the slope to the water's edge, still with that strange, winged feeling that comes in dreams, as though she trod the air. She reached the narrow mossy path that skirted the pool and sped along it to the bridge. The whistle had ceased, but it suddenly began again with renewed vigour as she drew near; and then, swiftly, with a faun-like agility, a figure in white made a flying leap on to the bridge out of a clump of fern and rushes which had concealed it.

Charmaine uttered a cry—a gasping, incoherent sound that seemed to come from the soul rather than the body—and in a flash the white figure wheeled and faced her.

She went up to him on the bridge with arms outstretched like a child who seeks to clasp a vision. "Rory!" she cried to him. "Rory! Oh, Rory!"

Her cry was no more than a whisper, as though it had been uttered in a dream, for every faculty was concentrated upon reaching him. And when she did so—touched him, grasped him, saw his dear brown face with the Irish eyes she loved gazing down into hers in a wide amazement, felt his arms close upon her with a vital strength, and heard his voice—curiously hushed, almost awed—say: "My God! It's Charmaine!" —she knew that her dream had come true at last, and nothing else mattered in all the world.

She lifted her face to his—just as simply and naturally as she had lifted it five years before—and their lips met in a long, long kiss of greeting.

END OF PART II.

(To be continued.)

ACROSTICS.

OUR fortieth series of acrostics begins with No. 185, printed below, and will run for four months. Prizes to the value of twelve guineas will be awarded to the most successful solvers.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 185.

SHERLOCK, great detective,
Is our first objective.
By him stands, as ever,
Doctor, not so clever.

1. Boys' school, upon a hill it stands.
2. Musicians this together bands.
3. A surgeon's instrument is shown.
4. Not gathered by a rolling stone.
5. For universal tongue designed.
6. Strong man, betrayed and rendered blind.

BOODLEBAR.

Answers to Acrostic No. 185 *should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor,* THE STRAND MAGAZINE, *Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on December* 11*th. They must be written on half-sheets of notepaper or on cards; at the foot of the solution must appear the solver's pseudonym, which must consist of one word only. Nothing else must be written on the same paper. Flimsy paper should not be used.*

To every light one alternative answer may be sent, provided that it is written at the side.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 184.

IN childhood's day they struggled for the crown;
One beat the other all around the town.

1. "The chieftain stood," pictured in laureate's page,
"Like the strong oak, amid the tempest's rage."
2. Here famous sisters lived; the name they bore
Named sailor's dukedom some few years before.
3. A place in Wessex first select, then take
The French for it, add head, and maid you make.
4. One letter add to this, there will be seen
City where Darling of the World was queen.
5. Give her a head, and she will be complete,
Whose mate, if he were headless, might be neat.
6. Who plants this fragment in the heart of tree
A man of many lines may hope to see.
7. Roving about from place to place; 'tis plain,
The central part is very far from sane.
8. What is all round is the first thing to find,
And then what is all round we leave behind.
9. A couple of his sons should we unite,
And change one letter, counsel we should sight.
10. Now comes the word—'tis present here, in fact—
That bids the country rouse itself and act.

PAX

1. T	albo	T
2. H	awort	H
3. E	lain	E
4. L	orbrulgr	U
5. I	xe	N
6. O	metric	I
7. N	omadi	C
8. A	tm	O
9. N	aho	R
10. D	onatio	N

NOTES.—Light 1. Southey, Joan of Arc, Tenth book. 2. The Brontes; Nelson was Duke of Bronte. 3. Wool. 4. Lorbrulgrud, Swift, Gulliver's Travels. 5. Vixen, fox; ox, neat. 6. Gean, wild cherry; geometrician. 7. Mad. 8. Atmosphere. 9. Genesis xxii. 21; father of Buz and Huz. Sergeant Buzfuz, counsel for Mrs. Bardell, Pickwick Papers. 10. Do, nation. Donation, a present.

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Work and Play at the London Sketch Club

By Leonard Crocombe

Illustrated by
THOS. SOMERFIELD

Phil May's mask of himself as the "Evil One."

ALFRED LEETE hurried across the room to greet me. I gripped his hand, and pulled mine away with a hot baked potato squashed in it.

That frivolous incident will serve to typify part of the atmosphere of the London Sketch Club.

G. E. Studdy, crouched up in a corner, drawing-board on knees, was engrossed in a sketch (not of Bonzo, this time). Imagining the remark to be a passable effort at sprightly "Bohemianism," I hailed him, cheerily: "Hallo, Studdy, learning to draw?"

Studdy, famous throughout two continents, growled solemnly: "That's what we're here for, isn't it?" And that may well typify the other side of life at the bi-weekly meetings of the London Sketch Club.

At the far end of a long, dark, narrow alley off the Marylebone Road there are some old studios with walls that ramble in quaint angles. In these happily-cosy rooms the London Sketch Club is housed—Bohemia, N.W., to which this privileged Philistine has been made welcome on three occasions, and has watched some of Britain's best-known artists at work—for fun; and joined in their fun—to plan which they sometimes work as hard.

This enthusiastic gang of earnest artists, so obviously enjoying every moment of their evenings together, was formed originally on April Fools' Day, 1898, by Phil May, Tom Browne, John Hassall, Cecil Aldin, Lance Thackeray, Walter Churcher, G. C. Haite (first President) and Dudley Hardy (first "virtuous vice").

The original working object of the cheery group was a monthly meeting from October to May for the purpose of making rapid memory sketches by artificial light from given subjects. Work began at seven, with the "show up" at nine, then supper: simple grub, honest beer, tobacco, song, and story. At its beginning on that April Fools' Day thirty years ago, there was forged in the London Sketch Club a happy link between work and play which has not weakened since. The members have always striven nobly against any such doleful atmosphere as that visioned by the poet Collins when he wrote: "As arts expired resistless dullness rose."

The main idea of the Club has remained the same: to encourage and facilitate spontaneous execution, reliance upon the inspiration of the moment rather than dependence upon laborious effort and studied effect. The technical advantages of this system of time sketching are many, for the picture done on the impulse of the moment encourages the best in the man, shows not only where his real talent lies, but the difference between that and mechanical dexterity. The jewels of artistic worth to be seen at Club exhibitions of these sketches done in two hours or less prove that art expression of a notable kind can be achieved without laboured execution; that

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painstaking attention to details is unnecessary in some of the most attractive and successful forms of pictorial art. These pictures, conceived of the inspiration of the moment, born of the instant grasp of subject and quick decision of expression, show the imprint of individuality to a more convincing degree than elaborated pictures in which a zealous, studied attention to detail and finish overshadow the vividness of a first impression. It is necessary also to remember that the subject of the time sketches is not known to the artists before the evening's work begins. Preliminary sketches or other notes are against the rules.

"Paint well and quickly," was the advice given to Mr. W. R. Sickert by his grandfather. "If you are to paint from Nature at all, it must be quickly." Mr. Sickert has proved the truth of this in his own masterly craftsmanship; and it is being proved weekly at the London Sketch Club.

Going back to the beginning of the Club, we find an interesting story. The original band of artists already listed had been members of the old Langham Sketching Club, from which they seceded—so the story goes—mainly because they could not get hot beef for their club suppers. And to-day the joke is against them, for they cannot, even now, get hot beef for their supper! John Hassall was the ringleader of those rebels. (To-day he remains as young as ever in spirit; as young, seemingly, as his own handsome son, who is also a member of the Sketch Club.) The original Club meeting-place was in an Old Bond Street picture-gallery. I caught that genial, entertaining Bohemian, Walter Churcher, in a reminiscent mood the other night; to his happy memories I owe much of the material in this article; and he told me that in those early days, "in keeping with our high art surroundings," they gave a reception at which some members impersonated public characters.

"I shall never forget the expression on the face of a staid policeman standing outside the premises," he said, "when he saw Dudley Hardy, made up as the Lord Mayor, stalk out to the kerb in his red robes, blow a cab whistle, and, having entered a shabby four-wheeler with his mace and sword bearers, drive off with those ornate emblems of civic dignity sticking out from the side windows!"

Leaving the realms of Bond Street, the Club moved to 19, Wells Street, just off Oxford Street. There in a unique old garret, a large barn-like place at the top of an ancient house, they found a congenial atmosphere. (At this point another story of Walter Churcher's fits in.)

"Before we got the fine upper floor at Wells Street," he told me, "we were tenants of the first floor, the top being then occupied by the Punchbowl Club—a wildly inconsequential institution presided over by an eccentric sculptor. Whenever they elected a new member he was expected to contribute a gift to the Club. As the nature of the gift was not specified there were some weird and wonderful donations, ranging from pictures and swords to flat-irons and kitchen fenders. Most of these gifts were hung on the walls and rafters. One frugal individual had bought twelve penny china mugs and handed them in as his contribution to the eccentric museum. They were accepted and hung in a row on a beam. One evening Sir L. Alma-Tadema was the chief guest at supper, and as the room became unpleasantly overheated, he was asked if he minded the windows being opened wide.

Front door—once the door of the condemned cell at Newgate Prison.

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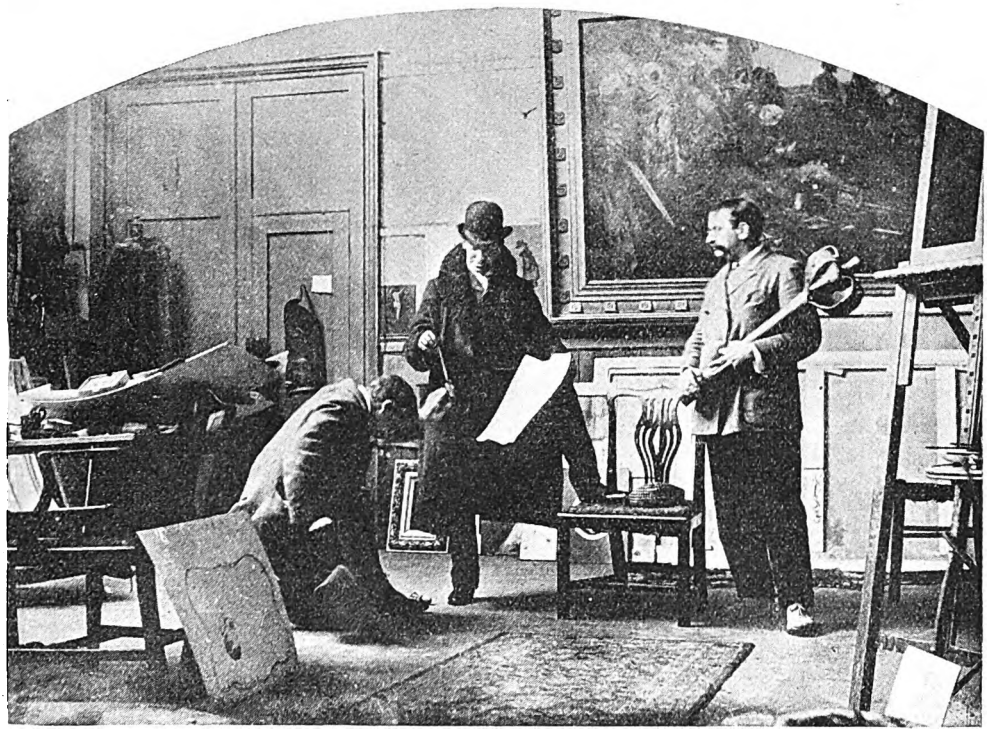

Cecil Aldin, Phil May, and Dudley Hardy signing the lease of the Club's premises.

" ' Not at all ! ' the R.A. replied, glancing up at the latest gift. ' It *is* rather muggy up here ! ' "

That same room, of which the Sketch Club soon obtained possession (the eccentric sculptor being averse to parting with rent-money), was spanned with thirty-foot beams, supporting a smoky ceiling so ancient that, it is said, on being asked to clean it up, the caretaker retorted :—

" Not me ! Why, years ago, when I last touched it wiv me brush, it come dahn on me 'ead ! "

Original members still recall with affection that the most interesting feature of this mellow home of the Club was a fine reproduction of an old tavern chimney-corner, designed by Cecil Aldin for the previous gathering of worldly wit and wisdom — the " Punchbowlers." This chimney-corner was introduced by the designer into one of his hunting pictures. The original, with its large, open fireplace, its mantel adorned with pewter plates and Staffordshire figures, was a comfortable lounge as well as a picturesque background for romantic costume figure studies.

Walter Churcher gave me an amusing account of his difficulties in getting the signature of Phil May, as a Committee man, to the lease of the Wells Street premises :—

" Phil was in his most elusive, Puckish mood, but at last I ran him to earth one Sunday morning at Cecil Aldin's studio, outside which I found a cabman, who asked me to inform ' the gent inside wiv a fringe ' that he had been waiting a solid hour. My advice to the cabby was not to worry but to go on waiting. Well, the elusive Phil, when faced with my demand for his famous signature, ' stone-walled,' urged his ' well-known Sabbatarian principles ' and so on, but finally agreed on one condition—that the thing was done ' in style.' So an historic tableau was thereupon staged."

(A photograph of the event, taken by Mr. Churcher, is reproduced herewith.)

" Phil impersonated King John signing Magna Carta ; Cecil Aldin, as a baron, knelt with pen and parchment ; Dudley Hardy, as another baron, armed with a fearsome weapon, was ready to ' dot ' King John should he show any further reticence about the autograph. Thus were the deed and Deed ' done in style,' as Phil had insisted. I believe, too, that after our drive

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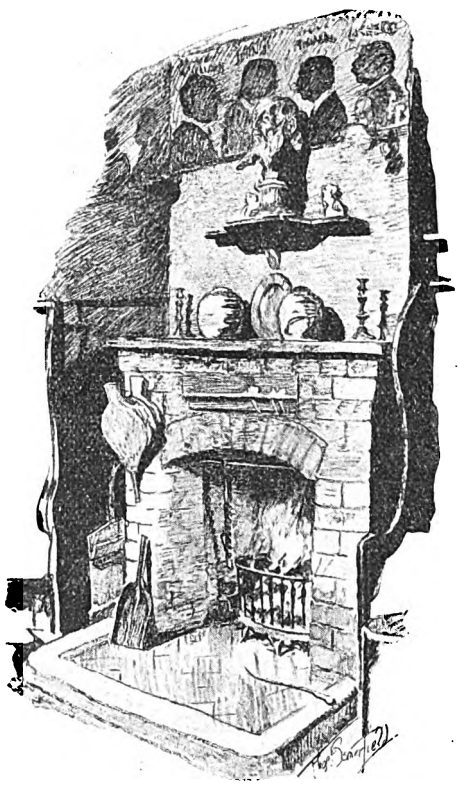
home that cabby was able to congratulate himself on taking my advice and waiting for 'the gent wiv the fringe.' Phil was always generous."

One of the treasures on the Club walls to-day is a mask of Phil May modelled by the great humorist-draughtsman as his impression of himself as "the Evil One"!

When the lease of the old Wells Street rooms expired and the Club moved to its present home in Marylebone Road, Cecil Aldin's old chimney-corner had to remain behind, but the "Sketchers" solaced themselves by reconstructing, lovingly, their old tavern bar. There it is to this day, where the parched "time-worker" may —and often does!— quench his thirst and oil his wit with beer of the best beneath the old sign of "The Sketchers' Arms."



The cosy chimney-corner, a striking feature of the Club premises. The bust above the mantel is of the late E. J. Odell, the famous Bohemian.

The main front door of these genial studios was once the door of the condemned cell at old Newgate. You can take your first peep at the London Sketch Club through the inspection hole used by the warders to watch those condemned to die. Over an inner door is the lamp that once shed its brilliance over the Empire stage door. My inquiry as to the history of its removal was answered, I thought, with some hesitancy. I gather that the lamp was "tactfully captured" (whatever that may mean) by Ian Hassall. Round the walls are many life-size silhouette portraits of members. These were started at the beginning of the Club, and in the early years were painted by Sandham on canvas from the members' candle-light shadows, and afterwards transferred to the walls. In later years they have been done by Charles Robinson. An interesting contrast in silhouettes is shown by one of the late "old Odell," and one of John Hassall's son done when he was a baby, complete with feeding-bottle.

The London Sketch Club, then, holds a unique position in the art world with so many distinguished members; it is certainly the best-known sketch club in Europe. And I imagine that no other sketch club in the world is composed of such a fascinating medley of the serious and the humorous — the excessively dignified and the hilariously comic talents.

Anything approaching a complete list of its famous members, past and present, would be impossible here; but a few names of world-renown, in addition to those already mentioned, may be picked at random: Charles Dixon, Starr Wood, Frank Reynolds, Lawson Wood, Hughes Stanton, Joseph Harker, the scenic artist, Claude Shepperson, René Bull, Edmund Dulac, Harry Rountree, H. M. Bateman, W. Heath Robinson, Charles Robinson (now Hon. Secretary with J. McMath Wilson), W. H. Barribal, Willy Pogány, Edgar Pattison, Gilbert Wilkinson, Norman Keene, and L. R. Brightwell, the President.

The list of honorary members includes the names of Sir George Frampton, R.A., F. W. Pomeroy, A.R.A., Sir James Linton, P.R.I., E. J. Gregory, R.A., Sir Alfred East, A.R.A., Albert Toft, and Fred Taylor, R.I. General Sir Robert Baden-Powell is the outstanding exception to the rule that working membership of the Club is confined to professional artists. Sir Robert has for many years held a special "working membership." He can be seen at work (1912) in the following painting by Charles D. Ward, R.O.I. In addition to the many celebrities, the membership is representative of the younger British artists whose work is now, or soon will be, familiar through book, magazine, periodical, and newspaper illustrations, posters, and exhibitions.

The weekly meeting together for work and interchange of ideas on a common

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subject cannot fail to stimulate, for the men are always students, ready for friendly criticism and suggestions. The Club is by no means anti-feminist—nor, in fact, anti-anything, except humbug!—but women are banned. No exception is made even for wives and sweethearts. The only women permitted to enter are professional models for the life classes which meet on Tuesday evenings.

Fred Buchanan is the Club's low comedian. John Hassall and Harry Rountree are its leading character actors; Stan Terry, its champion flipper of bread-pellets; Wilton Williams, its heavy-weight. (He's the bruiser in the "Tramp Supper" photograph in the striped jersey and bowler hat.) Thomas Downey holds the record for pickle-eating—or did at the tramp supper at which I tried to get hold of the jar.

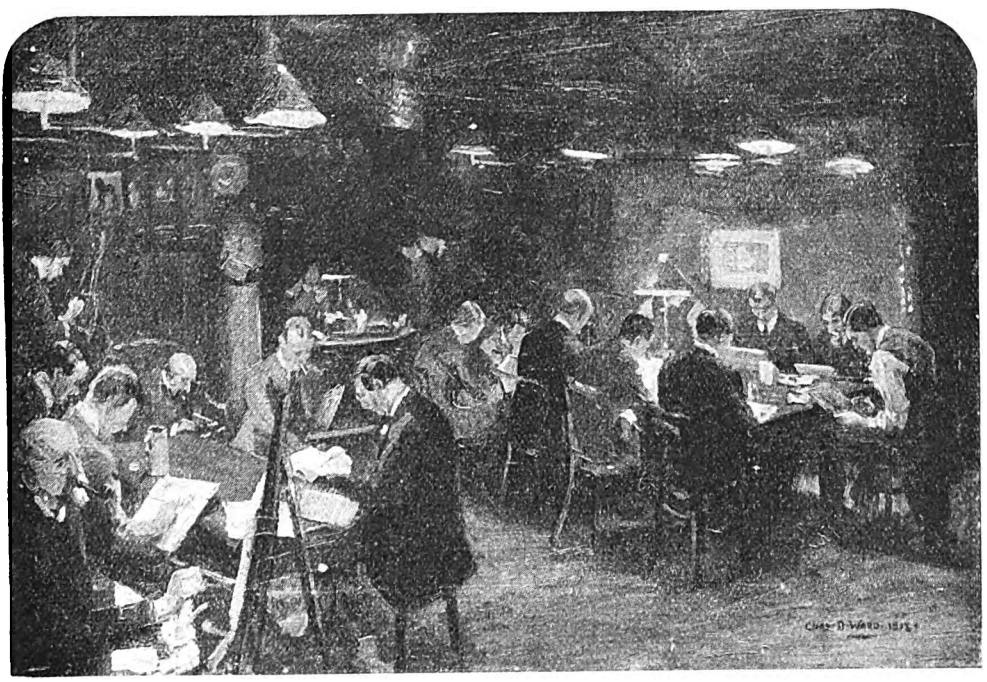
Let those few words introduce you to the Club's supper-time atmosphere of smoke and hilarity. Here is genuine Bohemianism—the real thing. Some men who like to be known as "Bohemians" are as conventional as bank clerks. But 246A, Marylebone Road, really is a little bit of Bohemia; and the "Sketchers" all merge amiably, unaffectedly, into the genuine atmosphere on these Tuesday and Friday evenings.

No one is allowed to be serious at supper or afterwards; and I pity the well-meaning visitor who might try to make anything approaching an after-dinner speech. "Ah—Mr. Chairman, gentlemen—er!" I doubt if he would get any farther. A potato, nicely boiled in its jacket, would make a tolerable missile. And someone would also score a "bull" with a bread pellet.

The last supper at which I was a guest was the Tramp Supper illustrated in these pages. Many of the men had spent considerable time and trouble on making themselves look disreputable.

We ate cold ham, hot potatoes in their jackets, salad, bread and cheese, and apples, washed down with beer served in hefty earthenware jars. Candles stuck in beer-bottles adorned the long tables, on which there were plenty of clay pipes and many jars of good strong shag.

It was great to watch John Hassall, fearful and wonderful in an indescribable medley of ancient clothes, impersonating a Russian peasant who had just arrived in London and wandered in by mistake. One entertainer, looking more like a much-scrubbed and genial navvy than a tramp, gave us a funny one-man pantomime. Others sang or played or told stories during the evening, for the talents of the



A working group including Sir R. Baden-Powell, under fourth lamp from the right.

(From a painting by Charles D. Ward, R.O.I.)

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A "Tramp Supper" at the London Sketch Club.

"Sketchers" are not confined to their brushes and are of a high order.

All this, in cold type, may seem rather trivial, but the humour provided is often better than that of the average variety theatre. On one of these festive nights the Club indulged in an elaborate bull-fight. The Club has, you must know, its Master of the Revels, this important office being most efficiently filled by George Parlby.

As an illustration of the amusing surprises often given to members after these suppers, the following, told by Walter Churcher, is typical:—

"When the ten o'clock War order came into force, I felt rather anxious as Chairman of one of the suppers, for the order had to be carried out strictly, and I imagined difficulties. As ten o'clock struck, however, the bar closed with a bang and three members correctly dressed as policemen marched from the cloak-room and either overturned or drank the contents of every tankard and glass in the room!"

An important sporting event is the annual challenge issued by the Sketch Club and the Langham Club to each other, on alternate years, to send a team to meet in rivalry. The subject of the competition is never known to the visitors until their arrival. It may be skittles—anything! The challenge is always issued in a very formal document bristling with insults and threats; and the reply is withering and scornful, the whole comic business being the prelude to a jolly evening.

A Friday evening. About twenty earnest men seated in various attitudes around a large table, busy picture-making with brushes and pencils. Watching them at work, as I did—why do so many modern artists look like smart London business men?—one marvels at their dexterity, the speed and sureness of their hands. The time sketches made at the Club are by no means mere rough sketches. In many cases paintings in oils or water-colours have been produced in the space of two hours worthy of a place on the walls of any connoisseur—pictures freshly vivid with imagination and vibrant in expression. The united output of these enthusiasts in the course of a year is something like one thousand pictures.

As with their work, so with their play—these merry men rely upon spontaneous inspiration rather than upon a laboured effort. And well do they succeed.

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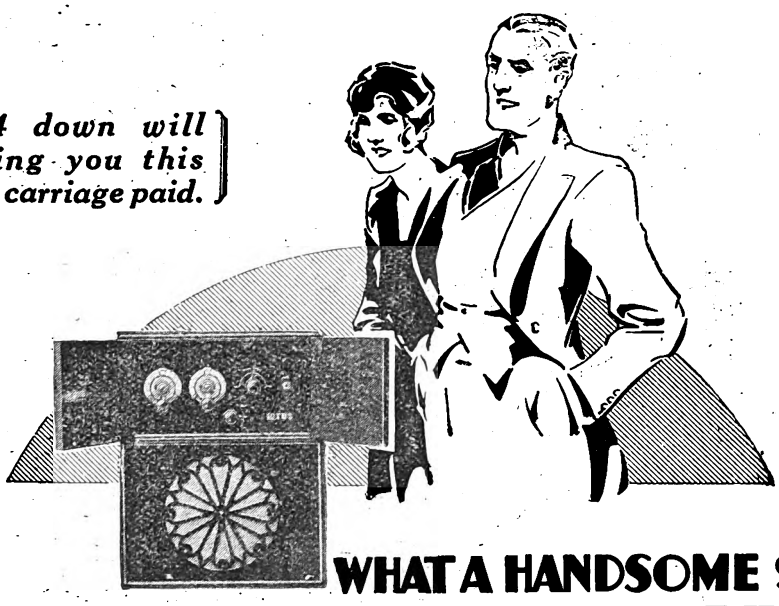

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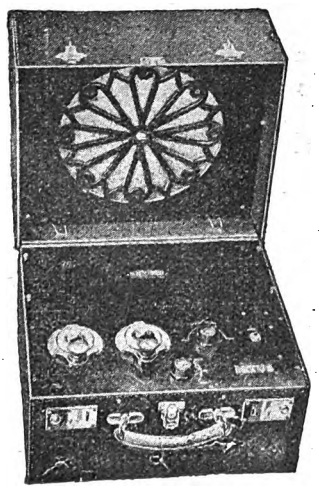

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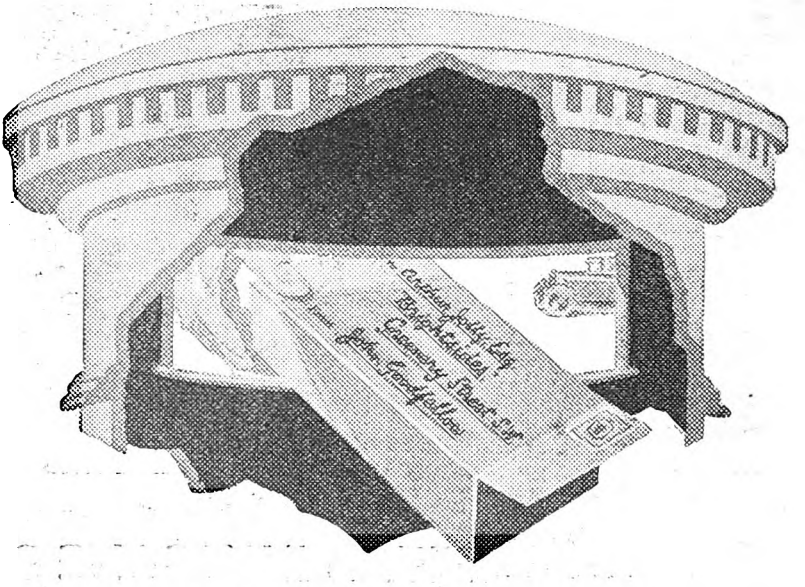

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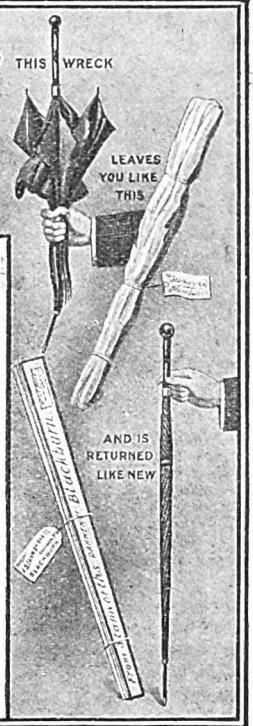

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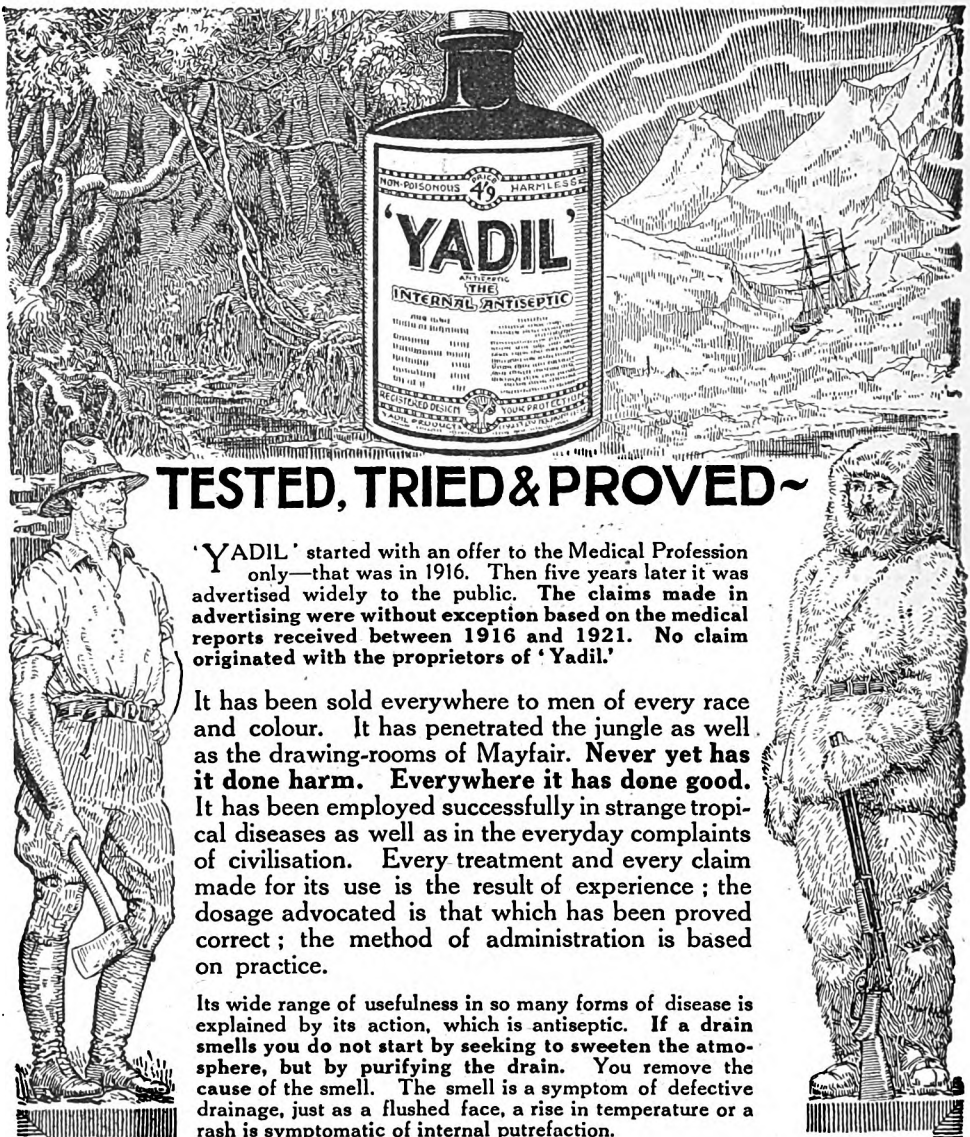

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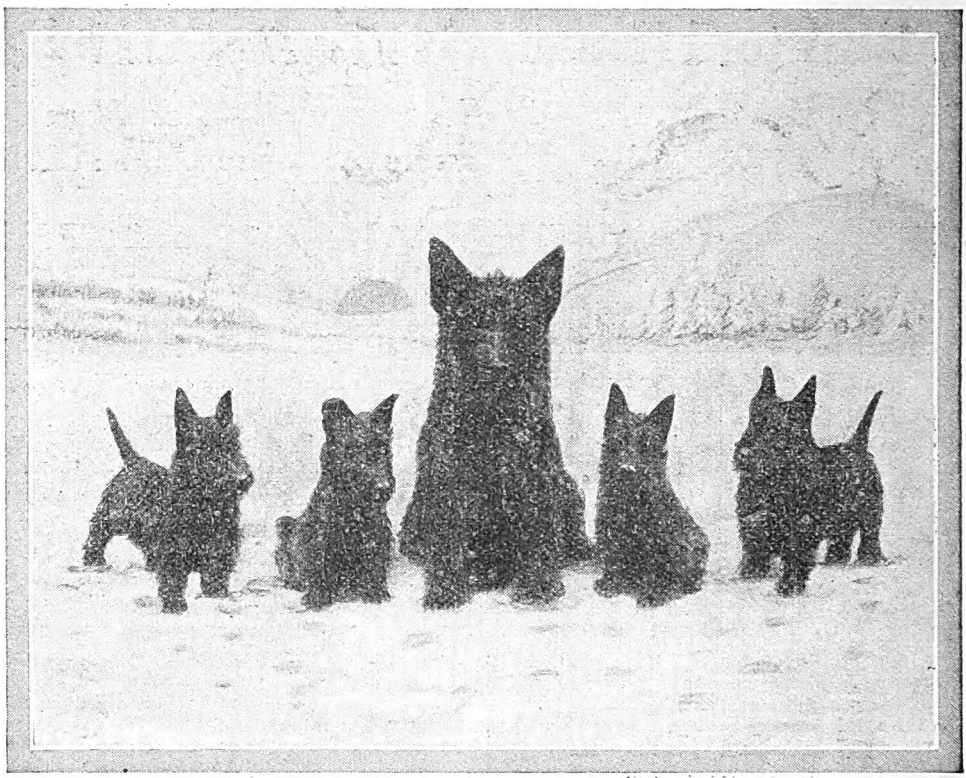

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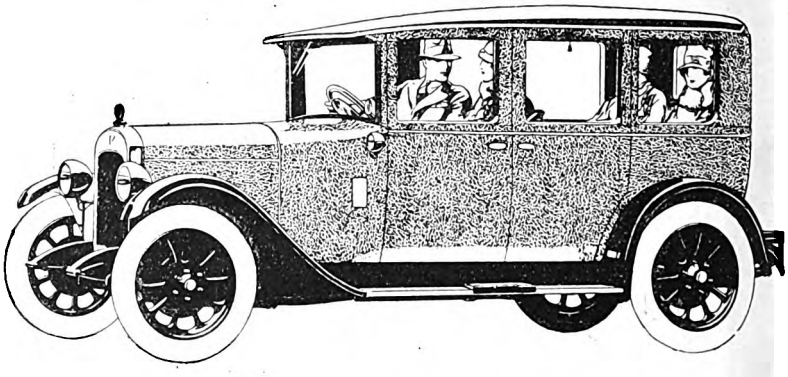

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IT IS QUITE TRUE

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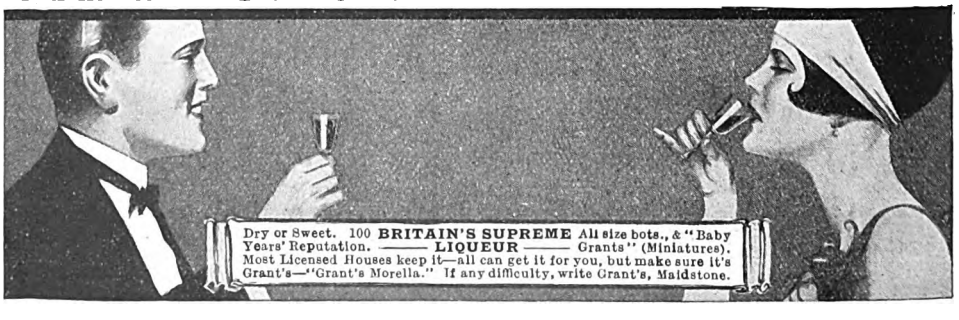

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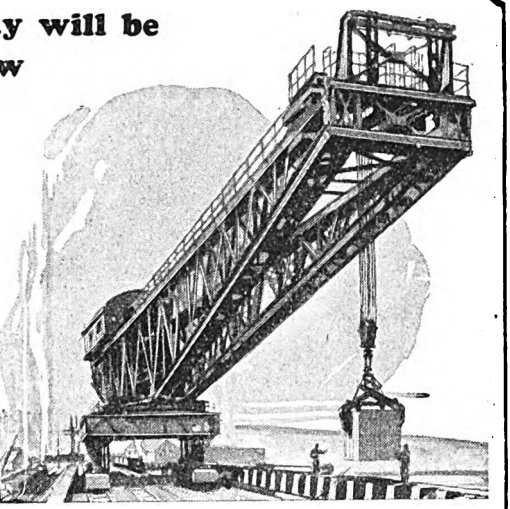

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MECCANO

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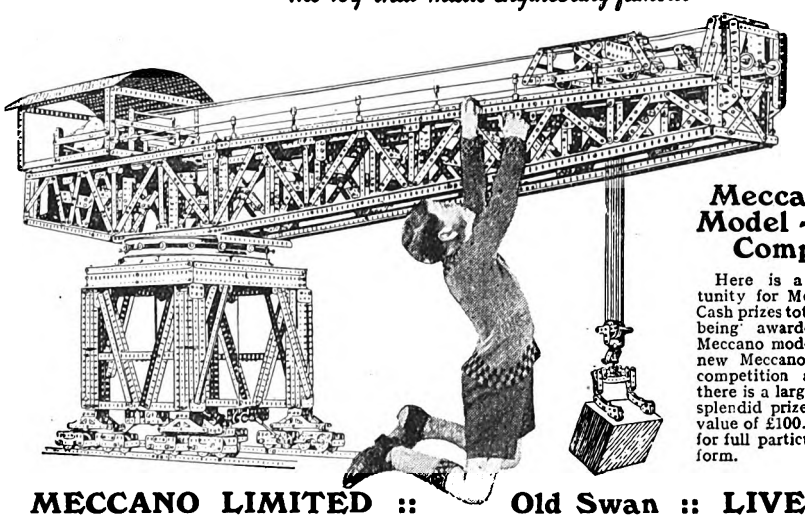

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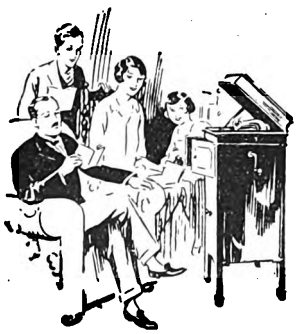

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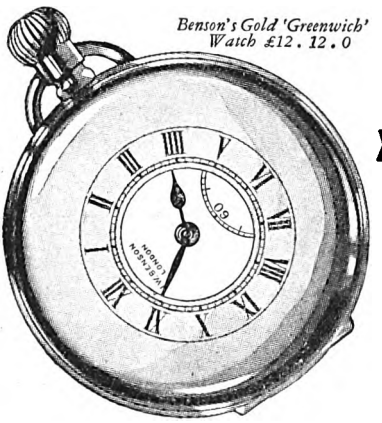

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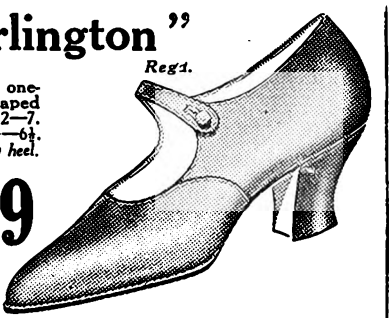

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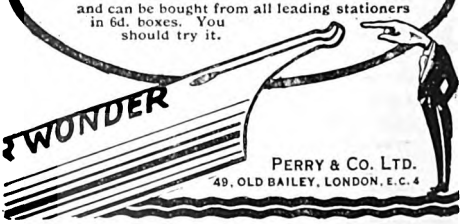

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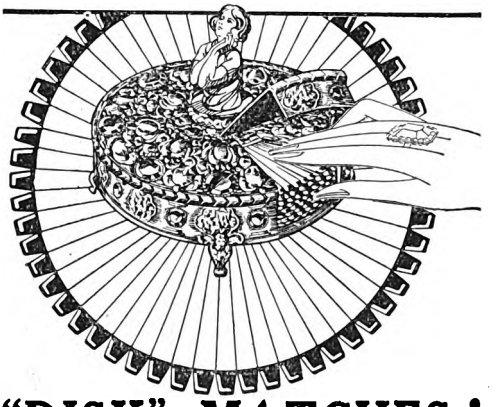

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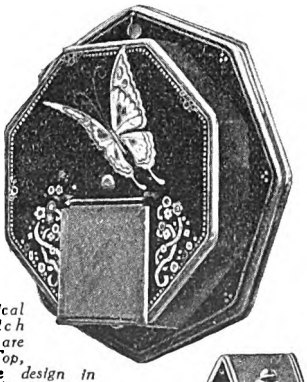

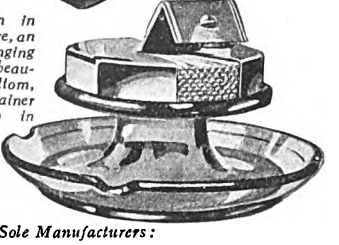

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1/3

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(either form gives you instant relief)

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In this Wear and Weather-proof Brown Grain, Storm Welted Shoe 21/9 Inland Postage 9d.

Buy this shoe now and it will be twice as long as usual before you need buy shoes again. In it are combined two remarkable qualities for endurance—Barratts' scientifically-modelled brown grain upper and Uskide sole and heel. You can laugh at wet weather—Uskide is waterproof, the storm welt stops wet creeping in between the upper and the sole, and Uskide won't slip. Moulded-in studs give extra grip on turf or "greasy" roads. An extended heel aids the walker and corrects any "treading over." It has smooth insole, is very flexible, and is surprisingly light for so sturdy a shoe.

Order Direct from Factory. State size wanted and Style X.103. Sizes stocked: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, in two widths, 4 (medium), 5 (wide). Send Footshape, pencil outline of foot in sock if size or width is not known. Enclose money order or cheque for 21/9, plus postage. Overseas mailing weight 3 lbs. 4 ozs. 10/- deposit with C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction or money back guaranteed.

Write for Superb Catalogue of Footshape Footwear Enclose Twopence Postage

W. BARRATT & CO., Ltd.
20, Footshape Works, Northampton.

A Gift that Men appreciate

Nothing gives a cleaner, smoother shave day in and day out than a Myatt Daymark Blade.

Every Myatt Blade is marked with the days of the week in such a way that each edge is used and rested in turn, and so preserves its keenness.

Give a man this Gift Package of twenty "Myatts" and you ensure him months of shaving comfort. He will appreciate your thoughtfulness—and your good sense.

XMAS GIFT BOX of 20 Blades 5/-

Made in England. Sold Everywhere.

Myatt PATENT DAYMARK **Blades** 1/3 FOR FIVE

For Gillette type Razors only.
Sole Manufacturers:
W. J. MYATT & CO., LTD., Argent Works, Birmingham.

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No. 40 FOR 4d (per pair)

Lucky for Boots

The Lace with the Extra Long Wear.

No. 40 for 4d. per pair, is a lace of Silk Finish, extra strength, made in all styles for Ladies' and Men's Boots and Shoes, ordinary or invisible eyelets.

OTHER QUALITIES:

No. 30 for 3d. per pair, Extra Super Glace Yarn.
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YOU NEED HURCULACES IN YOUR BOOTS AND SHOES.

If any difficulty in obtaining Hurculaces send direct to us for a pair and we will give you the name of nearest Retailer who supplies Hurculaces.

Manufactured by:
FAIRE BROS. & Co. Ltd., LEICESTER

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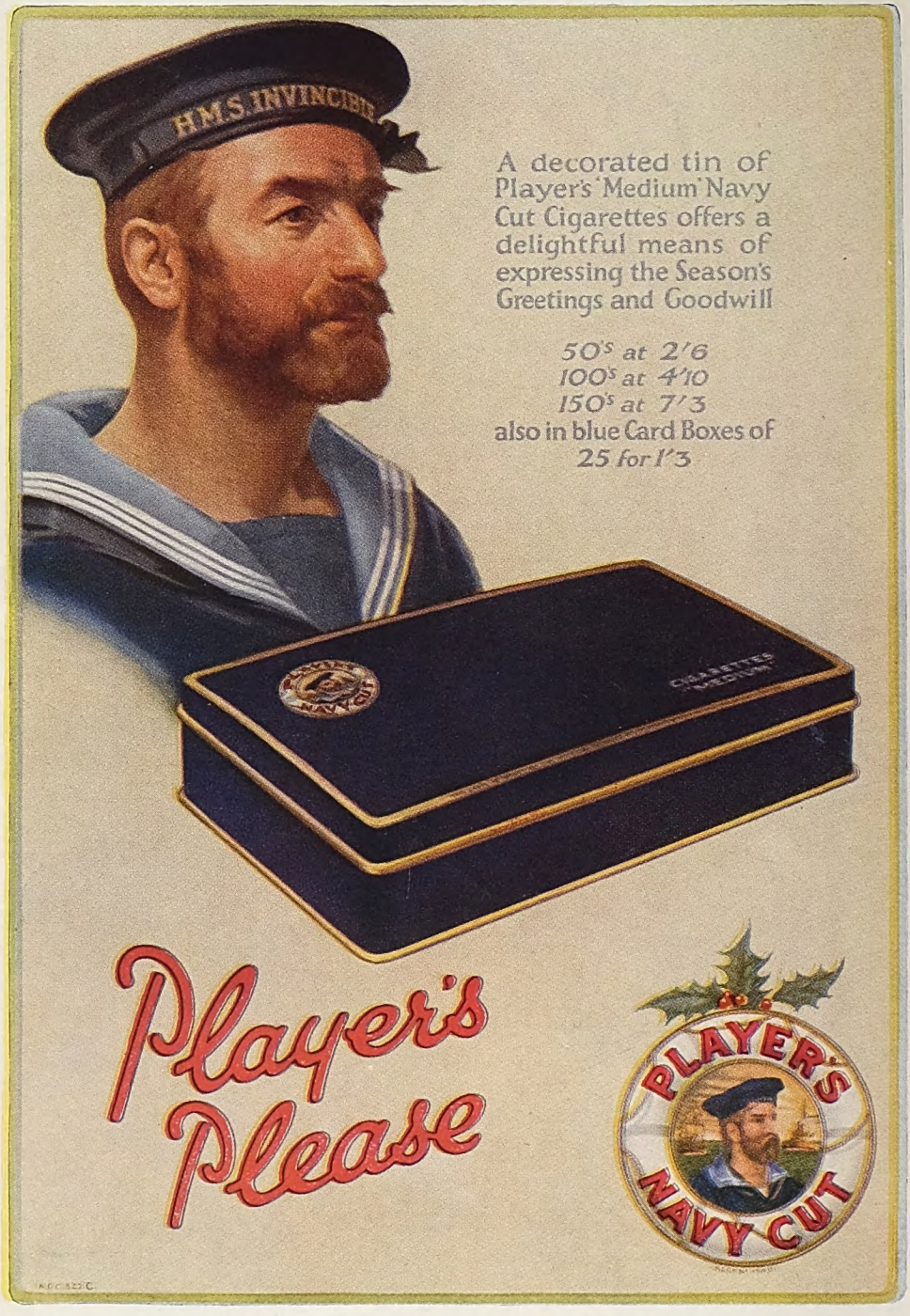

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A BOY'S IDEAL HOBBY

Fretwork provides hours of happiness for any lad. He can make anything from a toy to a loudspeaker, from a pipe rack to a piece of furniture. Give him a set of tools he can use and be proud of. Let him use his spare time with profit and pleasure. He'll be happy with a Hobbies Outfit.

There's no hobby quite like fretwork because it teaches the use of hand and brain in a pleasant and inexpensive manner, making articles in wood for use about the home. Designs are published for all manner of subjects from 1d. to 1/6, and Hobbies Outfits are obtainable to suit every pocket—from 2/6 to 45/-. But be sure to have Hobbies; cheap outfits contain foreign tools which will not do their work half so efficiently.

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The 1929 Catalogue has 280 pages of interest to any handyman. Articles on Wireless, Fretwork, Carpentry, Picture Framing, Cut-out Calendars, etc., as well as large free designs value 2/-. Illustrations of over 500 things to make, and dealing with 20 pastimes. Price 9d. from any newsagent or ironmonger, or sent 1/- post free.

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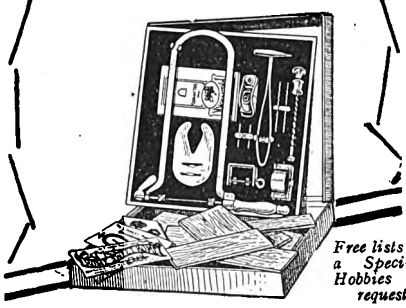
Look and ask for Hobbies Outfits at leading toyshops and ironmongers, or at any Christmas Bazaar. Branches in London, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds. Southampton, Brighton, or from Hobbies Ltd., County Works, Dereham, Norfolk

WHY NOT DECIDE ON THIS NOW?

HERE IS JUST THE OUTFIT FOR A PRESENT. IT IS THE MOST POPULAR FOR XMAS AND CONTAINS NOT ONLY A WIDE RANGE OF EXCELLENT BRITISH TOOLS, BUT A BOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS, WOOD AND DESIGNS FOR SIX SIMPLE ARTICLES TO START UPON. ASK FOR HOBBIES A1 OUTFIT. COMPLETE FOR 12/6. OR SEND POSTAL ORDER FOR 13/3 TO DEREHAM, AS BELOW, AND ONE WILL BE SENT BY RETURN.



Free lists and a Specimen Hobbies on request.

HOBBIES

BRITISH FRETWORK OUTFITS

MADE BY HOBBIES LTD., COUNTY WORKS, DEREHAM, NORFOLK

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You *can't* get wet in the

NOW 21/- Mattamac REG'D.

Feather Weight STORMPROOF

WE NOW SELL DIRECT TO THE PUBLIC ONLY. All models are reduced in price by the amount of the previous Retail Profit. In style, material and workmanship "Mattamac" Stormproofs are unchanged. The only change is DIRECT SELLING and that MAKES THEM 6/- IN THE £ CHEAPER.

A "Mattamac" is identical in appearance with the usual five-guinea Weatherproof. In utility, also, it equals its much-more-costly competitor. It weighs one-third, gives lasting wear and is **ABSOLUTELY WATERPROOF.**

Light and compact-folding, Wind, Chill, and Wet proof, a "Mattamac" is the *ideal* Coat for Business and Every Day Wear as well as for Week Ends and Holidays.

WEIGHT 19 ozs.

FOLDS INTO THIS SIZE

(Reg'd Trade Mark.)

21/-

For Ladies and Men.

"Matta" Fabric is exceedingly compact. The Coat worn by the 6 ft. man beneath, when folded, just made this handful.

Don't risk disappointment with an imitation. Get the genuine which is labelled "Mattamac" beneath the coat-hanger.

19 OUNCES WEIGHT 21/-

Colours: FAWN, OLIVE, GREY, NIGGER, SILVER, WINE, LEAF GREEN, COPPER, PETUNIA, POWDER BLUE, PILLAR BOX RED, BOTTLE GREEN, RUSSET, NAVY and BLACK.

Unbelted Models *For Ladies and Men* Now 21/- *(were 29/6)*

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Direct Drawings from photos of Stock "Mattamac" Stormproofs

MADE FOR EVERY OUTDOOR PURPOSE

Made entirely from the genuine "Matta" (Regd.) Fabric, in 15 shades and 40 sizes, with adjustable wind-cuffs, well-made pockets, lined shoulders, Raglan sleeves, roomy "under-arms," and the distinctive cut of the West End of London.

"MATTAMAC" ART BOOKLET POST FREE

Illustrating 11 Models. A p.c. brings Booklet and colour Patterns.

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You buy without risk. Send chest measurement over waistcoat (Ladies measure over the dress), height and remittance, stating colour needed, and your "Mattamac" will be sent post free British Isles (extra abroad). If you are not fully satisfied you can return it within 7 days and get your money back in full. Ignore imitations: get the genuine "Mattamac" Feather-weight Stormproof direct from any of the "Mattamac" Shops (addresses below). Send post orders with remittance or write for the "Mattamac" Booklet D 26

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(Six Doors from Oxford Circus).

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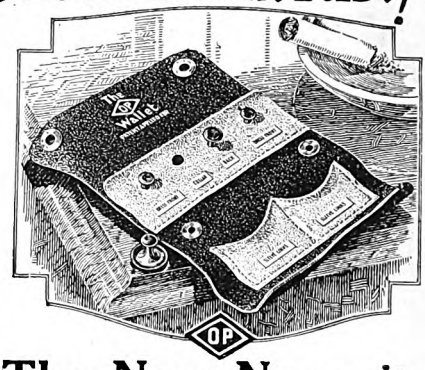

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Stud O.P. Wallet

Wallet of SIX, 9ct. Solid Gold **25/-**

Wallet of FOUR, 9ct. Solid Gold **15/6**

(De Luxe Wallet, 2/6 extra.)

Also in Jewel Cases at the same prices, and sold separately at 4/6 (collar) and 2/6 (shirt-front).

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G. H. JOHNSTONE & CO., LTD. (Sole Manufacturers), NORTHAMPTON STREET, BIRMINGHAM.

Above prices apply to United Kingdom only.

The World's best Shirt

It's always a problem to know what to give a man at Xmas, but you can't go far wrong with some tasteful, comfortable, long-wearing, made-to-measure shirts. Write to-day for patterns and self-measurement forms.

"Harnelene" (REG. TRADE MARK)

SHIRTS, PYJAMAS, DRESS FABRICS

Agents for the "RAPID" Trousers Press. A handy, light press easily adjusted. Price 2/6 (postage 6d. extra).

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Here is the finest BUNION APPLIANCE!! Patent swivel action. Scientifically constructed for use when walking. The

'IMPROVED VERNON' BUNION APPLIANCE

Approved and recommended by Doctors and Specialists. Unsolicited testimonials from patients who have been definitely cured and their toes straightened, undoubtedly mark this to be the foremost appliance. Send P.O. to-day for appliance and booklet. Price 8/6 each or 15/- per pair.

Also in a cheaper grade, price 4/6 each. Please state right or left foot, and give size shoe usually worn.

(Dept. F.), The Foot-Comfort Service, Henry Street, Northampton.

We also make special comfort shoes for those with tender feet. Particulars and illustrations gladly sent on request.

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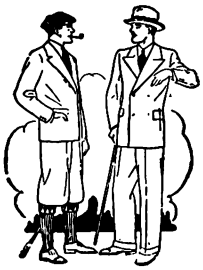
PURPLE DIAMONDS

THEY are stamped every few inches on DRI-PED Soles to enable you to identify the longest wearing sole leather you can buy. DRI-PED is the best investment you can make—it wears at least twice as long as ordinary sole leather—it cuts your boot bill in half.



The exclusive DRI-PED process retains nearly double the percentage of the original hide fibres than is obtained with ordinary tanning. That is one reason for the super-wearing qualities of this wonderful leather.

And contrary to the usual opinion DRI-PED is not heavy. It is even lighter than ordinary leather—soles made from rubber and leather substitutes are over 35% heavier. It is flexible, giving increased foot-comfort and it is absolutely water-proof. No need to fear the worst wintry weather if you are DRI-PED shod—your feet will remain warm and dry.

DRI-PED Soled Footwear can be obtained from all good-class retailers and stores, and any boot repairer can re-sole your boots with DRI-PED.

DOUBLE DRI-PED REG? WEAR

The Super Leather for Soles

Be sure to see the purple diamond stamped every few inches. It is your protection against imitations.

DRI-PED LTD. BOLTON

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"Develop your individual potentiality—and develop it to the limit. That is the great lesson which Pelmanism not only can, but does, teach."

[*Hay Wrightson.*
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So writes Mr. Gilbert Frankau, the well-known novelist and editor of "Britannia."

The opinion thus expressed by Mr. Gilbert Frankau is confirmed by the experiences of thousands of men and women, engaged in practically every known profession, trade and occupation, who have trained their minds scientifically by means of Pelmanism.

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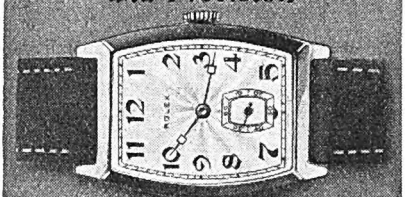
Leader of Fashion and Precision



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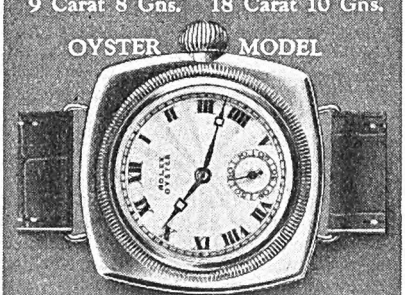

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Name "Rolex" on dial and movement.

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FIRMABAND TIES are double-ended and unlined. Made from Heavy, Pure, Macclesfield Silk, they are worn world-wide by discriminating men.

Firmaband Ties are woven on the straight, and as their name implies, have an extra firm band, enabling them to slip easily round the Collar, and they will not Stretch or Twist.

The Trade Mark woven on every tie is a Guarantee of Super Quality.

Obtainable from the leading Stores in London and the Provinces. Bunch of patterns and name of nearest agent will be sent on application to sole makers.

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Shaving is no Task

however stiff or stubborn the growth, if you use a

"KIRBY-BEARD" SAFETY RAZOR BLADE

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Made of special steel with keen edges specially suited for stiff beards. Fits all Gillette type razors.
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Use a "BEARD" to shave a beard

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MADE from the strong and supple material "Tremola" and retaining to the end their colour and texture. "Tremola" Shirts, Collars and Pyjamas are well-made, comfortable, and are obtainable at strictly reasonable prices in a fine choice of designs.

See Tab in every Garment.
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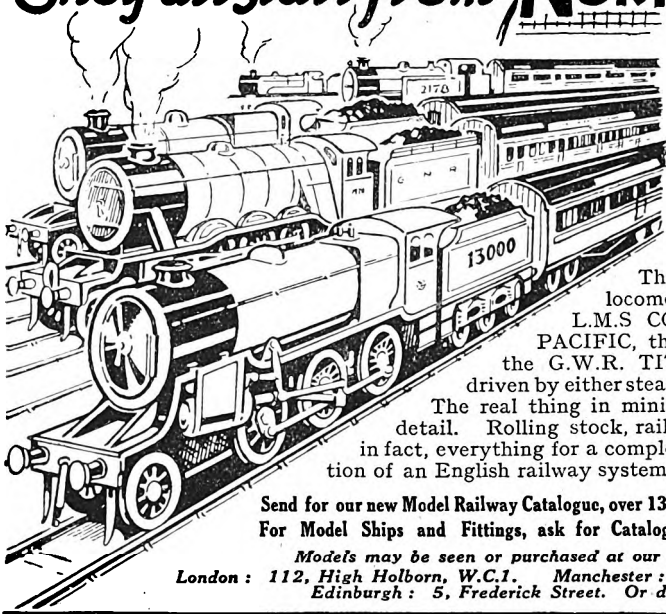
They all start from NORTHAMPTON



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Depend on a FULLOTONE for a right merry Xmas and have the real natural tone and enormous volume that only a Fullotone can give. You will spend your money to the best advantage and have no "after regrets."

Everyone agrees that Fullotone value is amazing; each of the Fullotone 20 different models is equal in every respect to other instruments costing over twice as much—and that is no exaggeration. They come direct from factory to home, a policy which saves our customers the enormous profit usually made by middlemen. This beautiful model costs only

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Or 25/- down and 11 monthly payments of 15/8. Carriage paid U.K.

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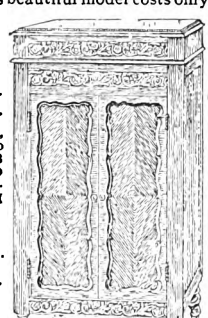
Also branches at Croydon, East Ham, Tottenham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester.



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V3 MODEL, with Head Lamp, Price 12/6 (Complete with Rear Lamp, Price 15/-)

From all leading Cycle Agents and Stores. REFUSE SUBSTITUTES. If any difficulty write direct.
Descriptive List "S"—FREE on Request.
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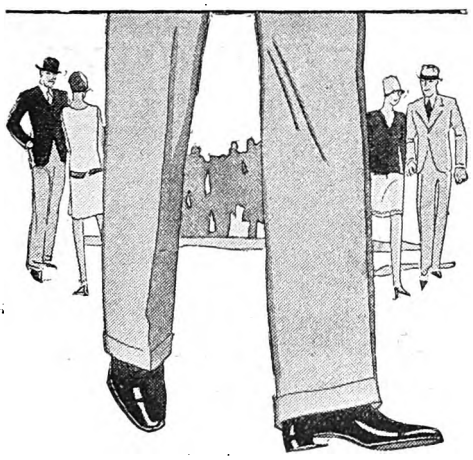

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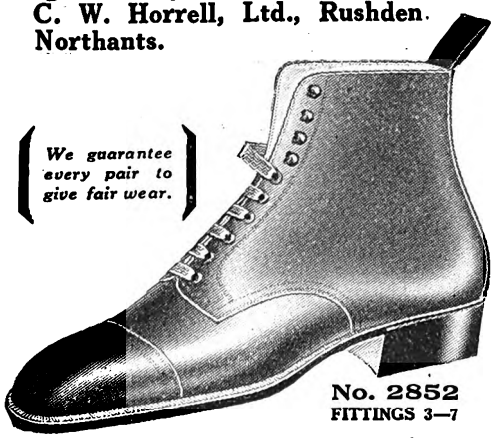
IF you try Oral Footwear once, you will adopt them permanently. For every Oral boot or shoe is made and priced, not only to attract buyers, but to satisfy users. Don't form your estimate of the moderate prices. Oral Footwear is in a higher class than the price tag suggests. If there is not an Oral agent in your town, write to C. W. Horrell, Ltd., Rushden. Northants.

We guarantee every pair to give fair wear.



No. 2852
FITTINGS 3—7

A superior Derby boot in selected Glace Kid with soft leather lining to toe. Made welted with smooth innersole and hard wearing bend sole. Also ask to see No. 2851, a similar boot in Balmoral at the same price - 22/6

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This Plan Will Bring You £250 A YEAR FOR LIFE—FROM AGE 55

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Are you satisfied with the progress you yourself are making? Have you saved anything like enough to justify a belief that at 55 years of age you will be in a position to take things easier? What about your family, should you, the breadwinner, be taken from them? The plan about to be explained will, if adopted without further delay, relieve you of all anxiety about the matter.

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At 55 years of age the Sun Life of Canada will start paying you an income of a fixed sum—about £250 per annum—and you'll receive this income every year as long as you live. Or, if you prefer it, you can have a cash sum down of about £3,000.

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For every deposit you make you receive rebate of Income Tax—a concession which will save you nearly £250 during the period, assuming the present rate of tax to continue.

£20 A MONTH IF UNABLE TO WORK.

If through illness or accident you lose the power to earn a living, and the disability is permanent, you are excused from making any further deposits and £20 per month will be paid to you until the £250 a year for life becomes due.

£2,000 FOR YOUR FAMILY.

Should you not live to the age of 55, £2,000, plus accumulated profits, will be paid to your family. If death results from an accident, the sum would be increased to £4,000, plus accumulated profits.

ANY AGE, ANY AMOUNT.

Though 55 and £250 a year for life has been quoted here, the plan applies at any age and for any amount. Whatever your income, if you can spare something out of it for your and your family's future, this plan is the best and most profitable method you can adopt.

£82,000,000 ASSETS.

The Sun Life of Canada has assets of over £82,000,000, which are under Government supervision. It is in an impregnable position. Do not, therefore, hesitate to send for particulars of this plan, which may mean great things for you and yours.

Write, giving exact age and amount you can save yearly, to J. F. Junkin (General Manager), Sun Life Assurance Co. of Canada, 6, Sun of Canada House, Cockspur Street, Trafalgar Square, London, S.W.1.

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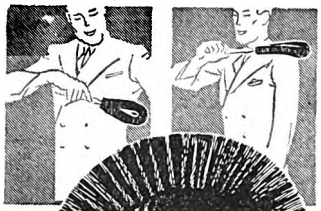

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There are no airs and graces about the "Skurree." It is brusque and matter-of-fact. It bristles with indignation at mud or dust as it cross-examines your clothes.

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The "Skurree" is all that a man's personal brush should be—a valet in itself!

As a Gift a "SKURREE" is always seasonable. At Christmas it is a personal Gift without equal for Quality and Service.

SPECIFICATION.

THE "Skurree" Brush measures 14", the handle 6" and the specially curved head 8".

The bristles are finest hog-bristle twisted into unrustable wire and are immovable.

The handle has an exterior beauty and an interior strength which is the result of the perfected "Varsity" finishing process.

In appearance and for unique utility the "Skurree" will instantly impress you.

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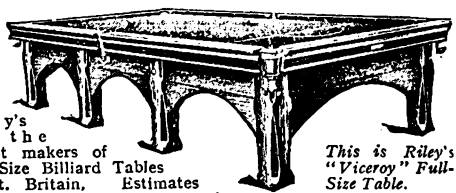

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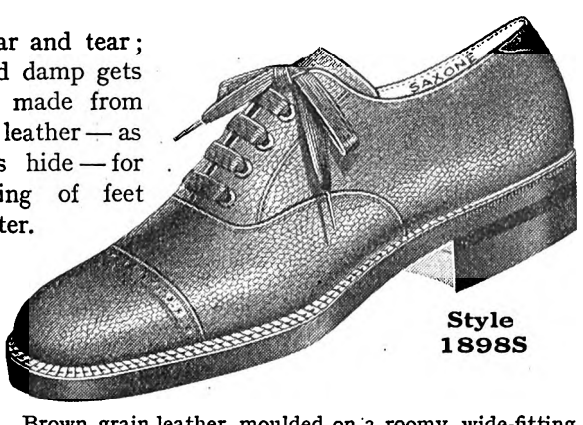

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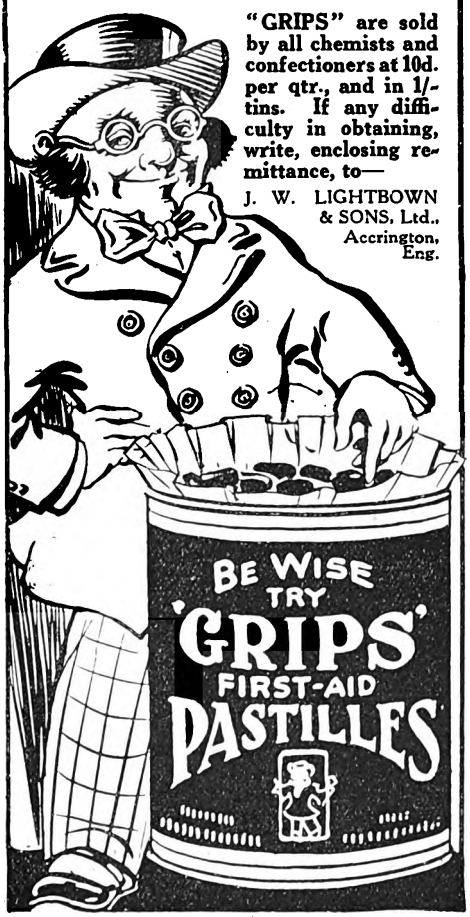

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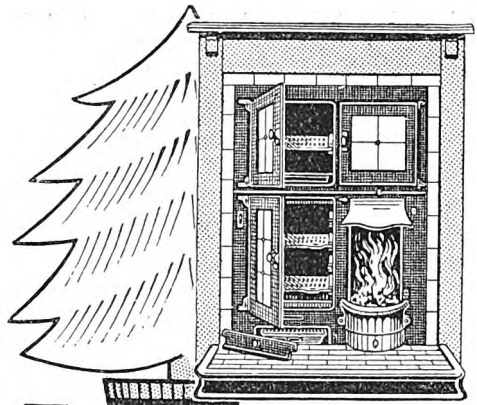

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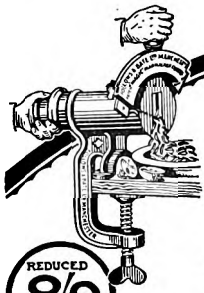

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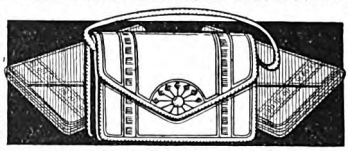

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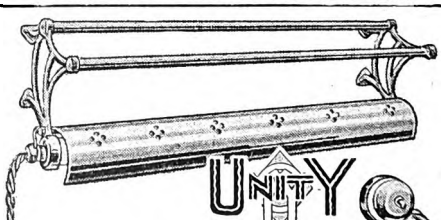

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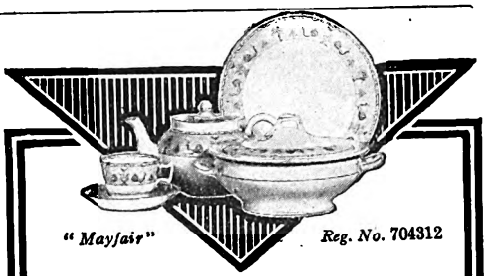

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Mincemeat.

1 lb. Shredded 'Atora.' 1 lb. Currants.
1 lb. chopped Apples. 1 lb. Brown Sugar.
1 lb. chopped Raisins. ¼ lb. Citron Peel.
¼ lb. Candied Orange Peel. 1 Lemon.
¾ lb. Candied Lemon Peel. 2 oz. Sweet Almonds, blanched and chopped.
½ Nutmeg, grated. ½ teaspoonful Salt.
1 lb. chopped Sultanas.
¼ pint of Brandy or Whisky.

Dry the sultanas and currants after washing. Mix all dry ingredients together after chopping. Lastly, add the grated rind and strained juice of lemon and the brandy or whisky. Mix all thoroughly. (Ingredients can be put through small mincing machine instead of being chopped).

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Christmas Pudding.

(Sufficient for 2 or 3 puddings.)

¾ lb. Shredded 'Atora.' 1 lb. Raisins.
1 lb. Currants. 1 lb. Sultanas. ½ lb Candied Peel. ½ lb. Sugar. 1 teaspoonful Baking Powder. ¾ lb. Flour. 2 oz. Sweet Almonds. Rind and juice of 1 Lemon. 4 Eggs. ¼ lb. Breadcrumbs. A little Nutmeg. Pinch of Salt. Enough milk to make it right consistency.

Clean currants, stone raisins, put all the dry ingredients into a basin, blanch and chop almonds, add eggs, well-beaten, grated rind of lemon, and the juice strained. Mix all thoroughly, put into greased pudding basins, cover with greased paper and steam 6 hours.

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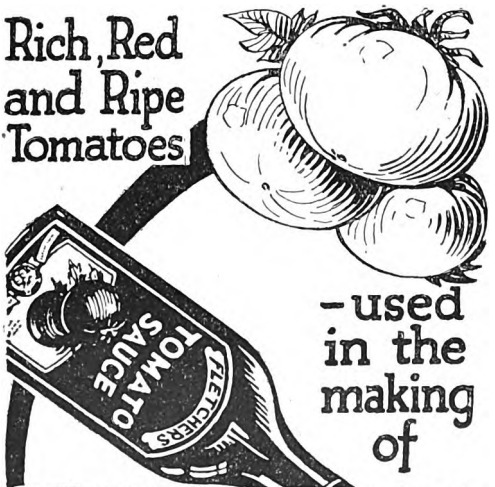

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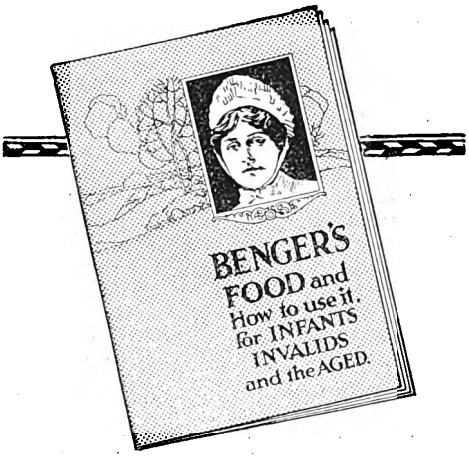

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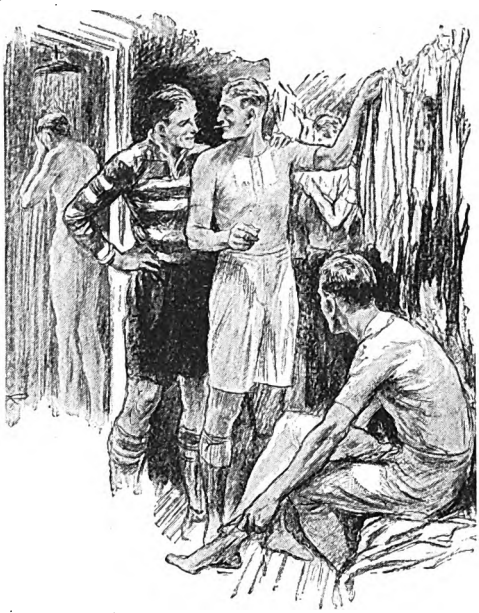

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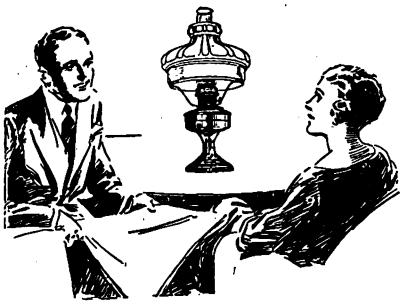

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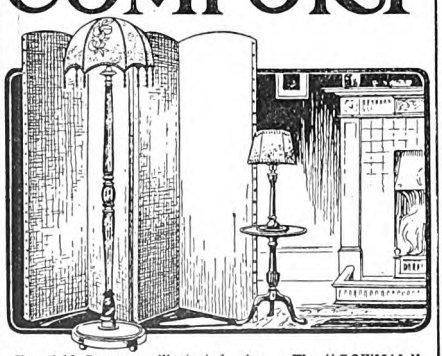

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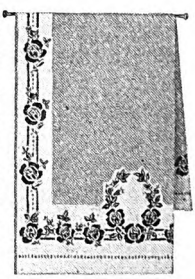

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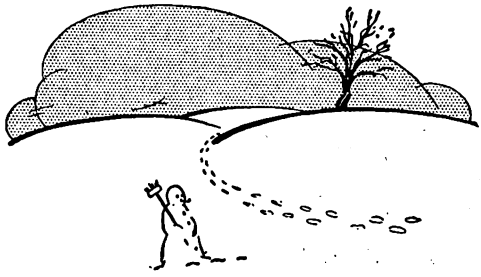

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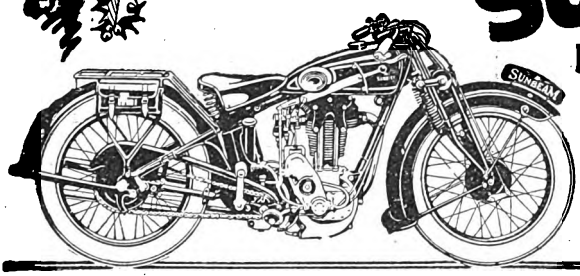

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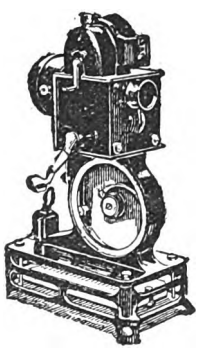

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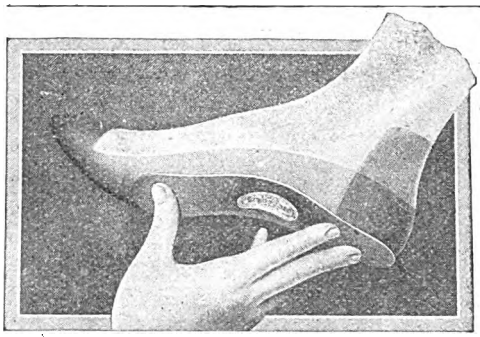

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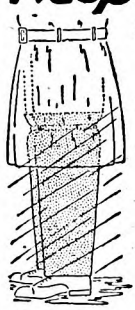

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Cut it out and attach it to your order, when you may deduct a 1/- from the purchase price.
Strand, Dec.

Corns

lifted right out!

Cutting corns is useless. Knives are dangerous and shaving the top off a corn does not affect the root at all. It is the pointed root which presses on the nerves and causes pain. Caustics are equally useless. The only way with an obstinate corn is Radox. After soaking your corn in a footbath containing a level tablespoonful of Radox Bath Salts you will be able to lift the whole corn out painlessly, root and all. Read this letter:—

"I cannot speak too highly of your Radox Bath Salts. I first used it about two years ago, and after a few days was actually able to pick out by the roots the corns from which I at times had suffered agonies. I have used Radox once a week ever since to freshen my feet and keep them sweet."
J. M., Cheddar.

When you put your feet in a footbath containing Radox, the salts soften the hard outer layers of the corn, and the oxygen which Radox liberates enters the pores, opens them, and penetrates further and further, carrying the corn-softening salts right to the root of the corn, which is thus loosened so that it may be lifted out bodily. Ask for Radox at your chemist's, price 1s. 6d. per ½lb. pink packet, 2s. 6d. double quantity.

Radox Bath Salts

Give your feet that "Kruschen Feeling."

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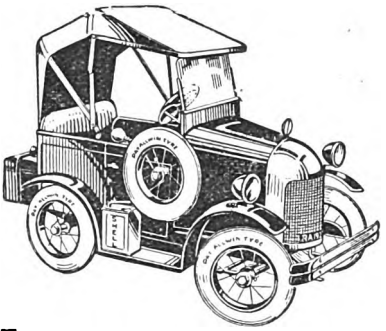

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TOCK SPEED BOAT 3/11 TOCK
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HOT AIR DRIVE from "Meta," spirit or candle-end. No clockwork, battery or boiler. Nothing to explode! Instant acceleration. 9 ins. long, draught 2 ins., Rudder
The great Indoor *and* Outdoor Toy.

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RUNS 15 MINS. without attention

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(The England-Richards Co., Ltd.),
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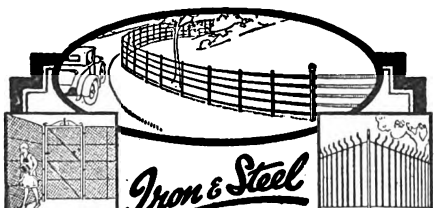

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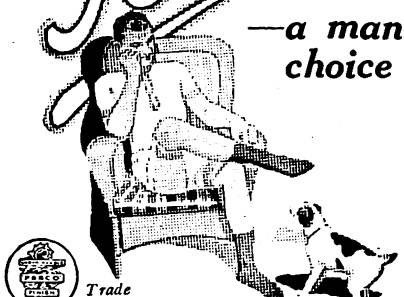

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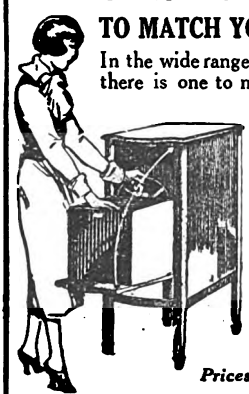

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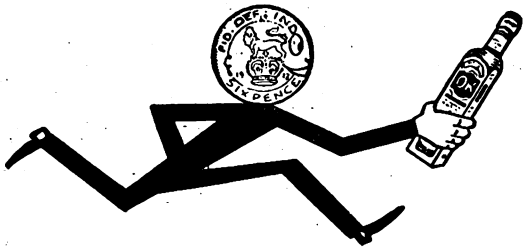

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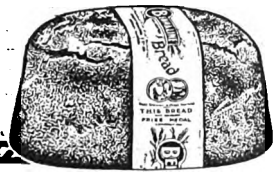

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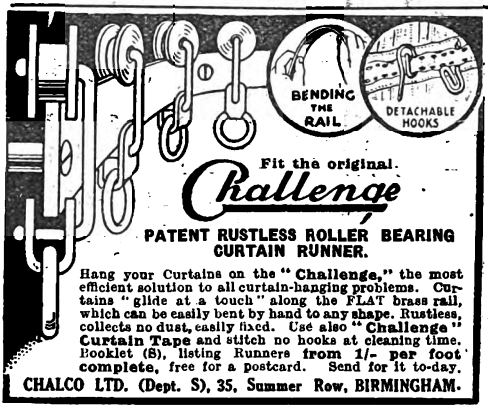

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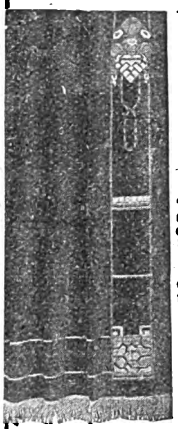

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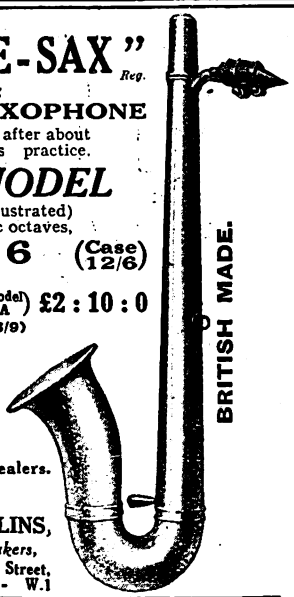

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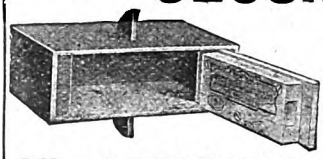

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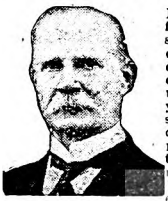
Conquered in 3 days.



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Naval Commander Praises Kruschen

The retired naval officer who has allowed us to publish the following letter suffered for years with a very serious skin disease, known to doctors as *psoriasis*. Read how he has overcome it :—

"I have suffered for years with psoriasis, and its usual co-evil, constipation. After trial of several specifics, I am now pursuing a routine which gives the best results of all that I have ever tried. Every other morning I take three parts of a teaspoonful of Kruschen Salts, in warm water, and a little later a cup of tea with a further pinch of the salts. The alternate morning I find the 'sixpence' dose sufficient in tea. The results are eminently satisfactory. I do not wish my name to appear in advertisement."

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5th September, 1928.

Constipation—which Kruschen prevents—is the cause of half the illness in the world, Eczema and a dozen skin diseases. Kruschen is a combination of six different mineral salts, of which each "little daily dose" contains just enough to keep all the internal organs functioning gently and regularly and properly.

Kruschen Salts

"It's the little daily dose that does it."

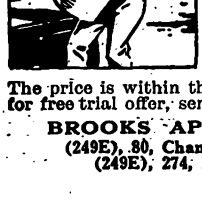
Every chemist sells Kruschen in 6d., 1/- and 1/9 bottles. A 1/9 bottle contains 96 daily doses—three months good health for a farthing a day.

Tasteless in Tea.

Stop Rupture Pain

With This New Discovery.

YOU CAN TRY IT FREE



Rupture sufferers no longer need fear heavy lifting, long work-filled days, as an invention has been perfected that not only retains with ease, comfort and safety but heals as it retains.

The rupture cannot "slip out" with this new discovery. Weighing but a few ounces, it can be worn both night and day. It can be washed daily. Thousands have been healed. The price is within the reach of all. Write to-day for free trial offer, sent in plain, sealed envelope.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO., LTD.,
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2 tins enough for ECZEMA

"I suffered with Eczema on my leg for nine years—it was slowly eating through to the bone. At last my mother persuaded me to try Germolene, and I am pleased to say two boxes effected a complete cure."
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Germolene instantly soothes the pain or itching. It never smarts. Its aseptic (germ-proof) action prevents aseptic poisoning. Special tissue building properties rapidly form new flesh.

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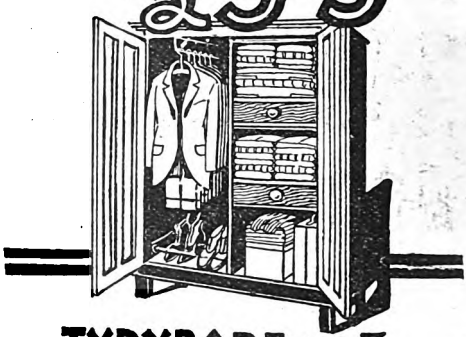

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The Doors are beautifully panelled and finished a rich antique.

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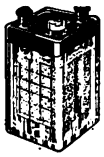

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Start Sketching this Winter!

By Percy V. Bradshaw

(Principal of the Press Art School)

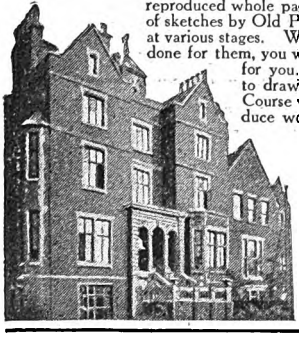
Have you a "second string to your bow"? *All of us* need a Hobby of some kind. Why not take up Sketching now the long Winter evenings are here?

Sketching isn't difficult. It isn't expensive. While for sheer joy and continued interest there is no Hobby to compare with it—quite apart from its possibilities.

Take the case of the Artist who drew the jolly "Old Salt" alongside. He took up Sketching as a Hobby. Through the help of my Courses he is now Cartoonist to a World-famous newspaper.

You may have no ambition to be a professional Artist—in fact the larger number of my Pupils have taken up Sketching for the joy alone. But if you *do* wish to Sketch your possibilities are the same as his. You will enjoy the same conscientious and inspiring tuition which has produced leading Artists in every branch of Illustration.

You can start with my Beginner's Course, and progress, easily and happily, from simple outlines in Nature to finished drawings of your friends! In my Prospectus I have reproduced whole pages of sketches by Old Pupils showing their work at various stages. When you see what I have done for them, you will realise what I may do for you. For those already able to draw, there is the Advanced Course which shows how to produce work which will *sell*.



Send a p.c. for the Prospectus. It tells you all about my Courses and is a convincing record of 22 years' *successful* Art Teaching by Post.

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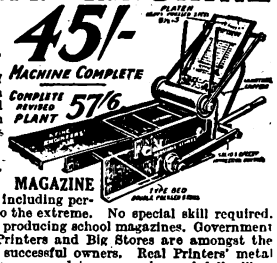

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"I have much pleasure in reporting that the course of Elasto Treatment, which I recently had, has proved most successful.

"Some time ago I gave up dancing. Indeed, I scarcely liked to go out of doors, my legs were so disfigured by Varicose Veins.

"I enclose a photograph which speaks for itself and is an unassailable proof of the complete success of your Elasto Treatment."

The original of this letter, with many others equally enthusiastic, may be seen at our offices.

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Elasto is the wonderful new treatment that cures through the blood, at the same time improving the general health and increasing vitality.

It is prepared in tiny tablets to be dissolved on the tongue, and is the pleasantest, the least costly, and the most effective treatment ever devised.

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Fitted bolted SLATE Beds and complete accessories.

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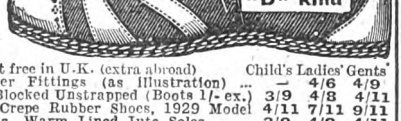

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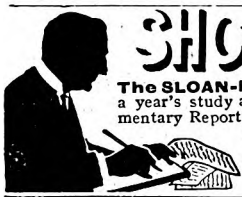

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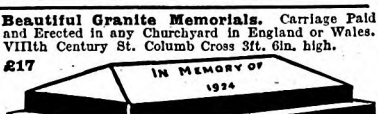

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CURED BY ELECTRICITY.

To-day the conditions of life are causing a serious increase in Neurasthenia and other nervous and functional disorders. The symptoms of Neurasthenia are many and varied. They are mainly mental or nervous, and often the victim is quite unaware of the fact that he or she is travelling rapidly towards nervous Exhaustion or Nervous Prostration.

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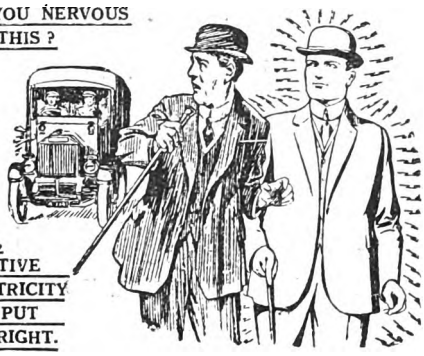

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The Electrological Appliances are the only inventions for the administration of Curative Electricity endorsed by over fifty leading Doctors and by the official Academy of Medicine in Paris.

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Are you Nervous, Timid, or Indecisive ?
Do you lack Self-Confidence ?
Do you dread open or closed spaces ?
Are you wanting in Will-Power ?
Are you "fidgety," restless or sleepless ?
Do you blush or turn pale readily ?
Do you shrink from strange company ?
Are you subject to sudden impulses ?
Do you crave for stimulants or drugs ?

If so, you can safely assume that you are suffering from Neurasthenia. The neurasthenic also often suffers from **Indigestion, Liver Troubles, Constipation, Palpitation, Loss of Appetite, Excess of Appetite, Dizziness,** and a host of other disorders due to faulty functioning of various organs. Electricity is the only force that naturally supplies the deficiency of Nerve Force and restores tone to the whole nervous system. To-day you can be

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by simply wearing the Electrological Appliances, which are light, easy, and comfortable to wear. They give no shock, but all the time they are being worn they supply the nerve centres with a continuous flow of electricity, naturally stimulate the circulation of the blood, and increase nerve nutrition. This is the natural and physiological treatment of Neurasthenia, which drug treatments can never cure. The Electrological Treatment has cured the most obstinate cases of Neurasthenia and Nervous Disorders when all other methods have failed.

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If you are suffering from any form of Nerve Trouble, or if you have any of the symptoms as described above, write to-day for a book that may well prove of incalculable health value to you, yet it costs you nothing. It is entitled "Guide to Health and Strength," and will be sent post free. There are Special booklets for Ladies and Gentlemen. Please specify which is required when writing, mentioning also if the Treatment has been recommended by a Doctor or a cured patient. Write to-day, or, if you can, call personally at the **Electrological Institute, 56, Vulcan House, 56, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4. Free Advice and Demonstrations will be given.**

The Electrological Institute has been established 80 years, and expert Advice based on successful experience only is given.

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(Issued by the British Turvey Treatment Association.)

Few people, who have not studied at first hand the question of Alcohol, realize what a very short distance there is for a man who has been accustomed to casual between-meal drinking to go before his system becomes definitely affected—and with his system his whole outlook on life. Alcohol is relentless. Once it obtains a hold, it never lets go, until it has been fought and beaten. And its attacks are insidious. There is little difficulty in finding an excuse for a drink if we want one ; but each time we deliberately confuse our desires with our needs we sow the seeds of future trouble. Once a man's system is affected, that is to say, when once he relies upon alcohol as a daily necessity, that man is lost . . . unless he happens to be the one man in five thousand who is strong enough to cut it off at a moment's notice, or unless he invites the aid of the Turvey Treatment. Men who have drunk even, from the "moderate drinker's" standpoint, slightly to excess over a period of years become to a certain degree abnormal. It may not be apparent to the casual observer, but it is so none the less. Alcohol is the great deceiver. The ridiculous fancies and desires of a man "in wine" are known to us all, but what is not generally understood is that these abnormalities exist (though naturally in a minor degree) in the brain of the habitual drinker even when he is what is supposed to be sober. We use the word "supposed" advisedly, the truth being that the habitual drinker is never completely sober, and cannot be so until he has undergone a process of dis-intoxication. That is where the Turvey Treatment can help him.

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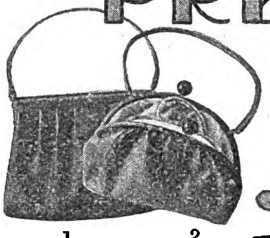

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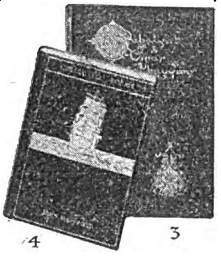

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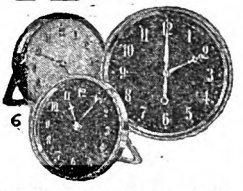

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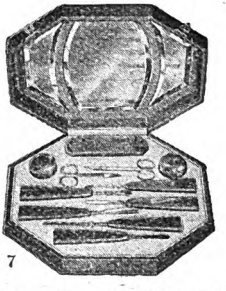

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The Strand Magazine.

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Frontispiece: Scarcely had the echoes of the kiss died away when Osbert was aware that there was standing at his elbow a tall, broad-shouldered man.

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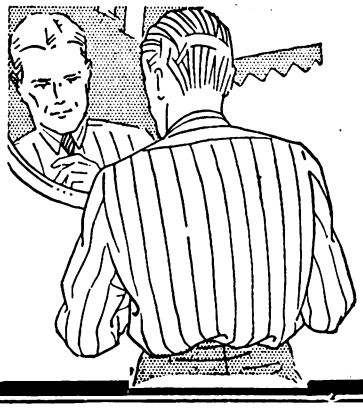

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The characters and names in the stories in "The Strand Magazine" are entirely imaginary and have no reference to real persons.

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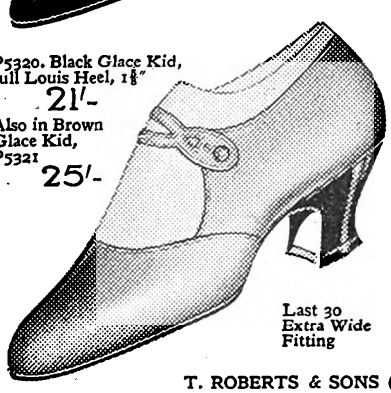
The Index to Volume 76 can be obtained on application to the Publisher.

Most of the Original Drawings of the Illustrations in this Magazine are for sale. Terms may be had on application to the Cliché Department, George Newnes, Ltd., 8-11, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.



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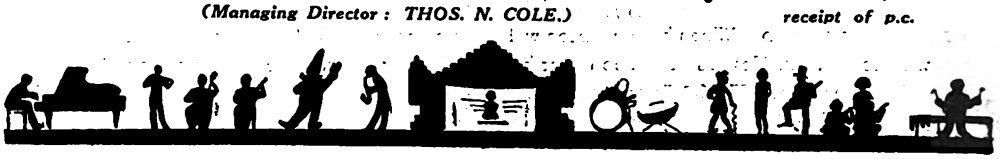

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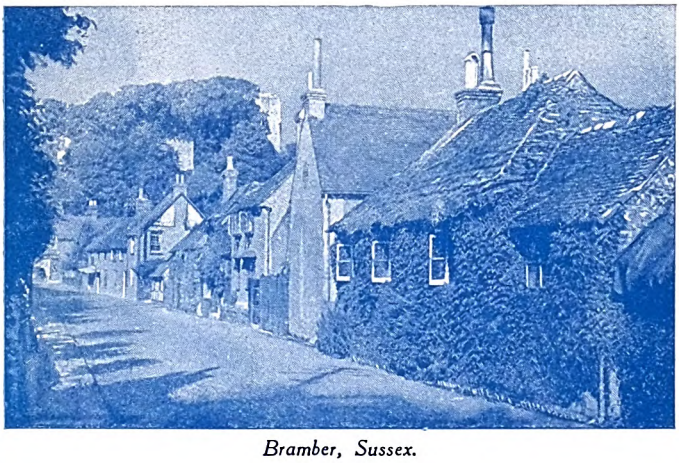
The Oldehove Tower, Leeuwarden, Holland.



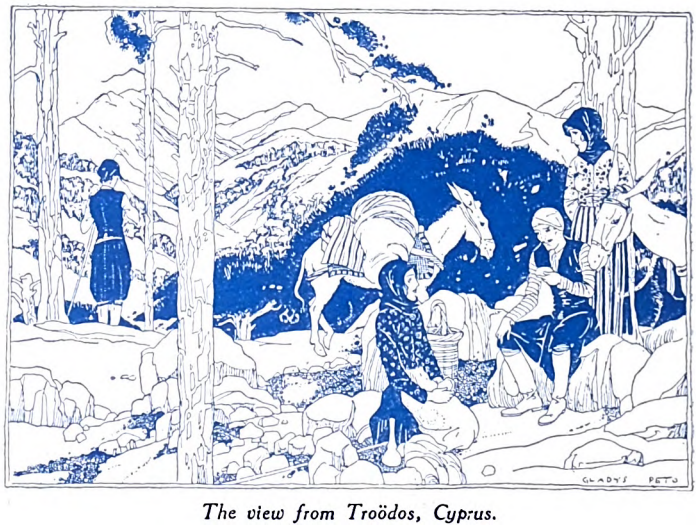
Bramber, Sussex.

MALTA AND CYPRUS.
By GLADYS PETO.
(*Dent. 5/-*)

There are three kinds of guide-books: (1) the kind which endeavours to capture the atmosphere of a country; (2) the kind which contents itself with places and facts; and (3) the kind which deals more in personal impressions. This book by Gladys Peto falls, as her own delightful illustrations lead one to expect, into the third category. What the author found and liked, not what the reader is likely to find and enjoy if he follows in her tracks, is this guide's main concern. And very good reading it is.

SUSSEX.
By S. E. WINBOLT and E. and W. WARD.
(*Bell. 6/-*)

This guide is a guide to places and not persons. Look within for any fact about any of the places of interest in the county by the sea and you will find it. Try to find Sussex within and you will not find it. The book doesn't pretend to that, but it does show you the road you must travel if you would discover Sussex. It concerns itself with castles and churches and ruins, and sufficient historical data to enable the traveller to see with understanding eyes. Not a book to read through, but one to carry in one's pocket for easy reference—and excellent of its kind.



The view from Troödos, Cyprus.

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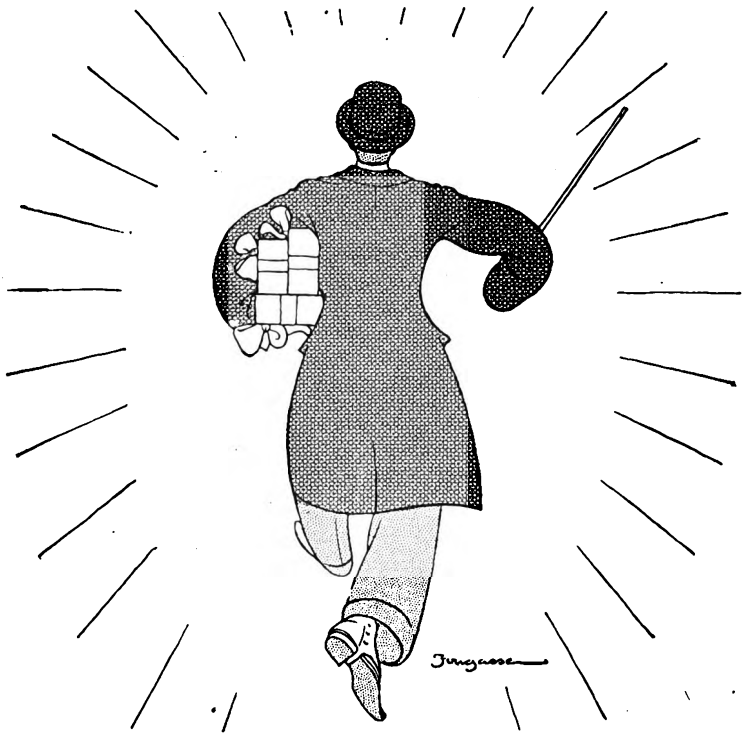
A Young Man with Great Gifts



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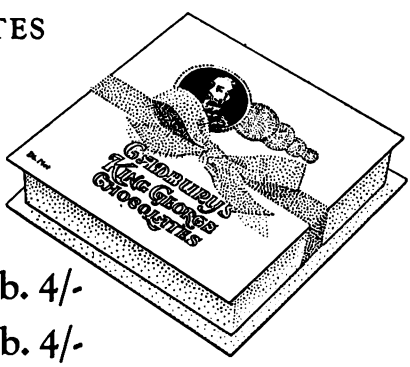

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St. Dorothy.
By Harry Clarke.

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A "panic party" from a "Q-ship."

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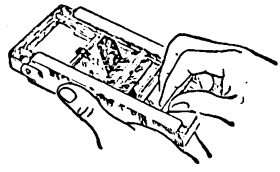

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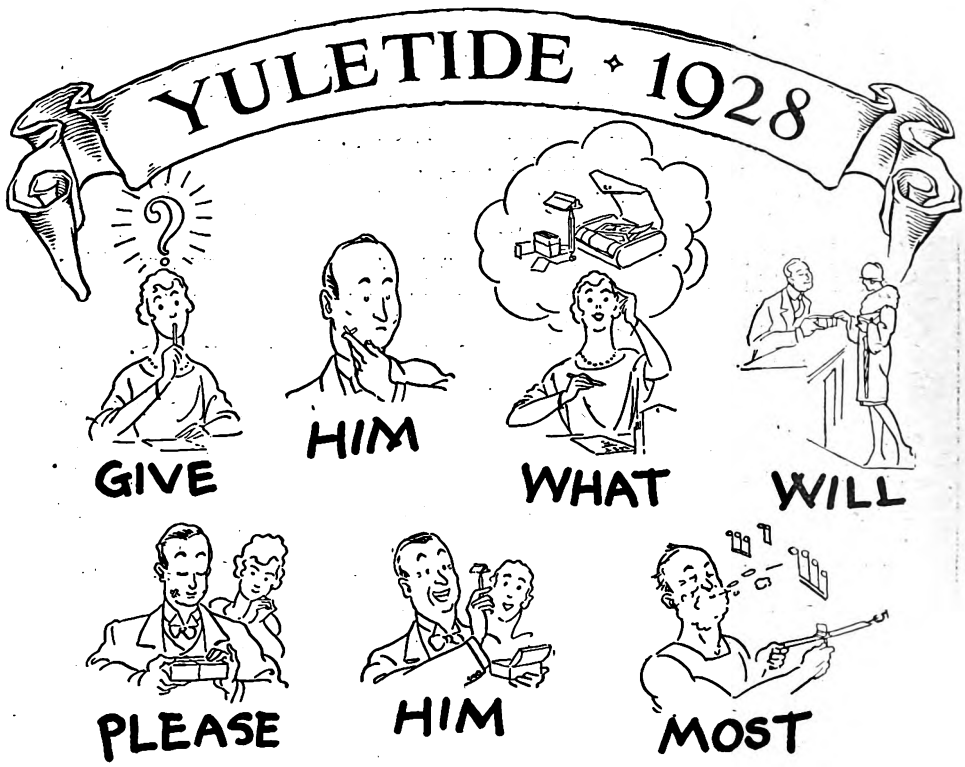

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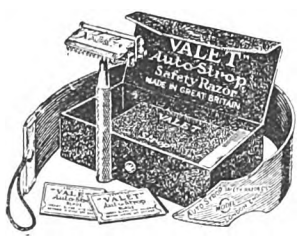

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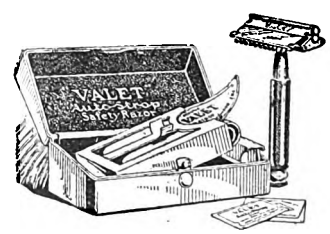

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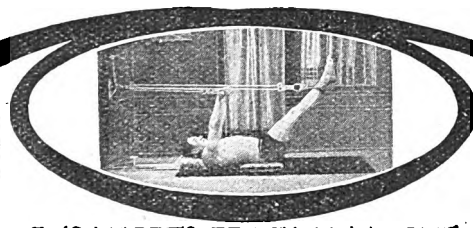

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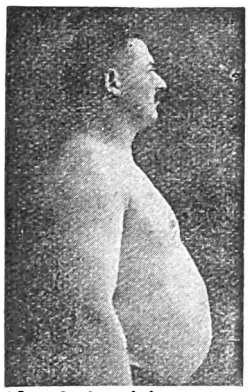
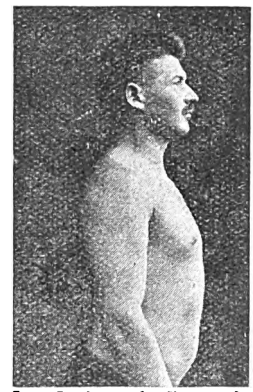


A Swiss Gentleman before treatment

EDGAR WALLACE

(the famous novelist and playwright)

writes:—



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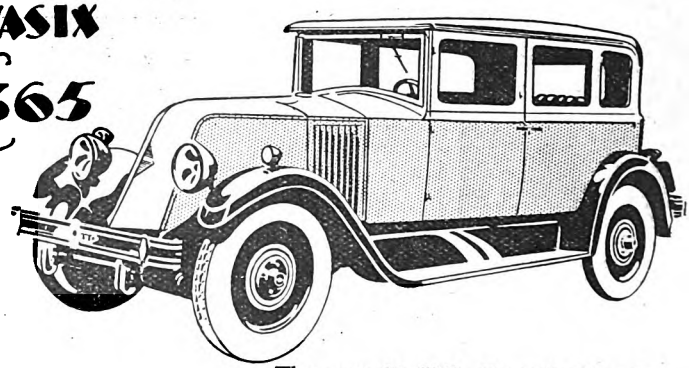

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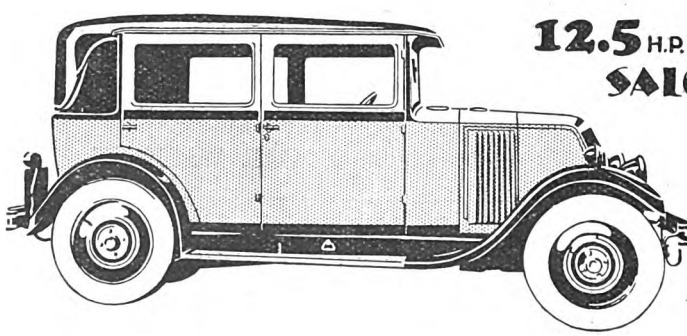

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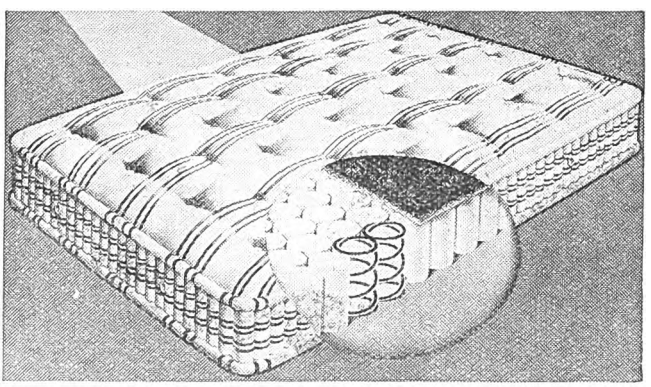

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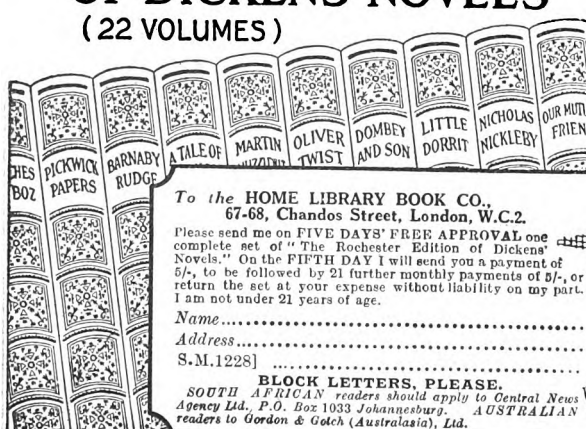

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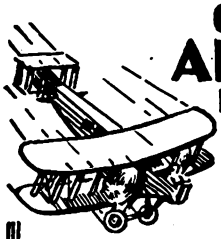

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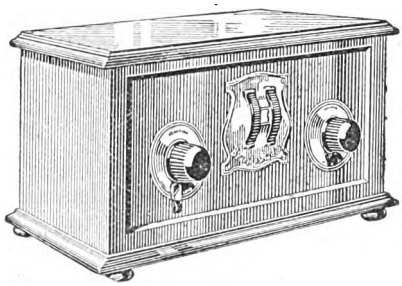

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(Certified statement by Mrs. Shannon. Read her letter.)

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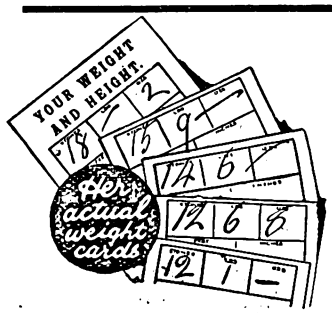

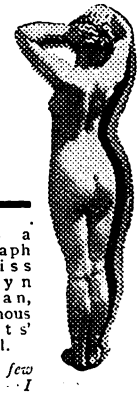

This is a photograph of Miss Evelyn Vaughan, the famous artists' model.

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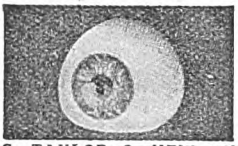

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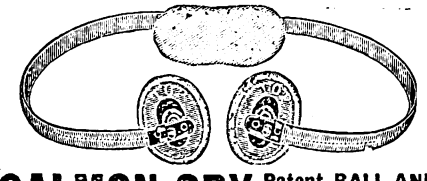

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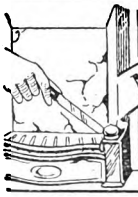

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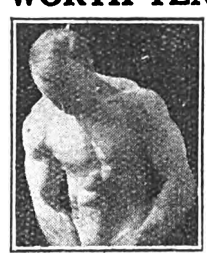

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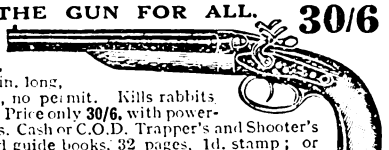

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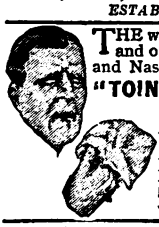

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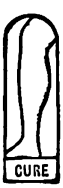

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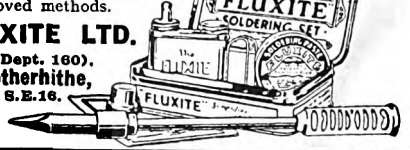

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UDYARD KIPLING P.G.WODEHOUSE
PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM "SAPPER" (H.C.McNeile)

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

ONE LONG LAUGH!

Complete Story
By
P.G.WODEHOUSE

LY

1/-

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Flavour that makes you hungry!

Kellogg's CORN FLAKES

THE triple goodness of toasted corn and cream and luscious fruit! Serve strawberries with your breakfast bowl of Kellogg's Corn Flakes and enjoy a glorious treat!

Kellogg's are simply great these days—for lunch or dinner as well as breakfast. What zest their flavour adds to meals! Airy-light and wholesome. Exceptionally easy to digest. Never tough-thick—but extra-crisp.

Eat them with cold milk or cream—and, for extra relish, add fresh or preserved fruits or honey. Pears, prunes, bananas, raisins.

Order Kellogg's at hotels and restaurants. At all grocers. Always oven-fresh in the inner-sealed wax-wrapped packet.

Made in the famous Kellogg Kitchens at London, Canada, by the Kellogg Company—world's largest producers of ready-to-eat cereals. Makers also of Kellogg's ALL-BRAN, Pep Bran Flakes, Krumbles and Kellogg's Shredded Whole Wheat Biscuit. Other plants at Battle Creek, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Sydney, Australia. Distributed in the United Kingdom by the Kellogg Company of Great Britain, Ltd., 329 High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Sold by Kellogg agencies throughout the world.

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G. WODEHOUSE : E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM
BRITTEN AUSTIN : ROLAND PERTWEE : "SAPPER"

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

OXO
for
Tasty
Sandwiches

THAT STATE OF LIFE
By
ROLAND PERTWEE

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Life is fun — when you're fit

Young—strong—enjoying life fully—yet old enough to know that energy must be replaced—strength replenished . . . regularly, completely. He leaves it to Horlick's, at mid-morning and at night, and never needs to worry.

Horlick's Malted Milk is obtainable everywhere at 2/-, 3/6, 8/6 and 15/-; also in tablet form in glass pocket flasks. Cafés, restaurants and soda fountains serve Horlick's in many delightful ways—cold or hot.

The New

HORLICK'S MIXER

Horlick's, cocktails, eggs, all your kitchen mixing can be better done in this new mixer—nothing can go wrong and nothing could be easier to clean. The price is 1/6 from chemists, grocers and stores or direct post free from Horlick's Malted Milk Co., Ltd., Slough, Bucks, together with

FREE SAMPLE of HORLICK'S MALTED MILK TOFFEE

keep fit on HORLICK'S

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GILBERT FRANKAU

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

"COMPANY FOR GERTRUDE"

A New Humorous Story

By

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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Happy breakfast days!

Kellogg's CORN FLAKES

THESE days that begin with Kellogg's Corn Flakes and sliced bananas! Here is a *double* treat. The goodness of ripe bananas . . . and corn toasted to delicious crispness!

Kellogg's are extra inviting served with fruits. Pears, prunes, raisins, peaches. Serve with honey, too, in addition to cold milk or cream. Enjoy them for lunch, dinner or breakfast. A wholesome dish for kiddies. Never tough-thick—but extra-crisp. Always easy to digest.

Order at hotels and restaurants. Sold by all grocers. Always crisp and oven-fresh.

Made in the famous Kellogg Kitchens at London, Canada, by the Kellogg Company—world's largest producers of ready-to-eat cereals. Makers also of Kellogg's ALL-BRAN, Pep Bran Flakes, Krumbles and Kellogg's Shredded Whole Wheat Biscuit. Other plants at Battle Creek, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Sydney, Australia. Distributed in the United Kingdom by the Kellogg Company of Great Britain Ltd., 329, High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Sold by Kellogg agencies throughout the world.

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Things you can't help noticing about

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(Trade Mark)

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GILBERT FRANKAU : STACY AUMONIER

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

OXO
—a
safeguard
against
colds and
Chills

THE DANCE FROCK
By
H. A. VACHELL

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Life is fun—when you're fit

He's sixty—and in the prime of life.
How *is* it done?
Every morning at 11, and again last thing at night he drinks a glass of Horlick's—hot, "dressed up," or cold. Thus he gets all the nourishment needed by any such man.

Let Horlick's keep you fit and well.

Horlick's Malted Milk is obtainable everywhere at 2/-, 3/6, 8/6 and 15/-; also in tablet form in glass pocket flasks. Cafés, restaurants and soda fountains serve Horlick's in many delightful ways—*hot or cold.*

The New
HORLICK'S MIXER
makes Horlick's delicious. All your kitchen mixing too, can be better done in this new mixer—nothing can go wrong and nothing could be easier to clean. Price 1/6 from chemists, grocers and stores, or direct from Horlick's Malted Milk Co., Ltd., Slough, Bucks, with a

FREE SAMPLE OF HORLICK'S MALTED MILK TOFFEE.

keep fit on HORLICK'S

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POTTER'S ASTHMA CURE

Send for Free Trial

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Lucky for Boots

The Lace with the Extra Long Wear.

No. 40 for 4d. per pair, is a lace of Silk Finish, extra strength, made in all styles for Ladies' and Men's Boots and Shoes, ordinary or invisible eyelets.

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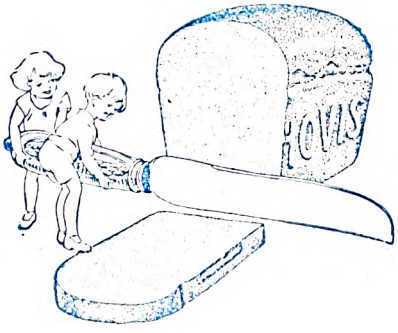

With a spreading of butter HOVIS is not far from being a complete diet. Body-building proteids are there. So are natural phosphates which nourish brain and nerves. Digestive too, and the flavour pleases.

HOVIS

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Best Bakers Bake it.

HOVIS LTD., LONDON, BRISTOL, MACCLESFIELD, ETC.

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WATERMAN'S LATEST TRIUMPH — A MANUFACTURING MIRACLE

Alluringly beautiful Colours in RUBBER — the only suitable material for Fountain Pens

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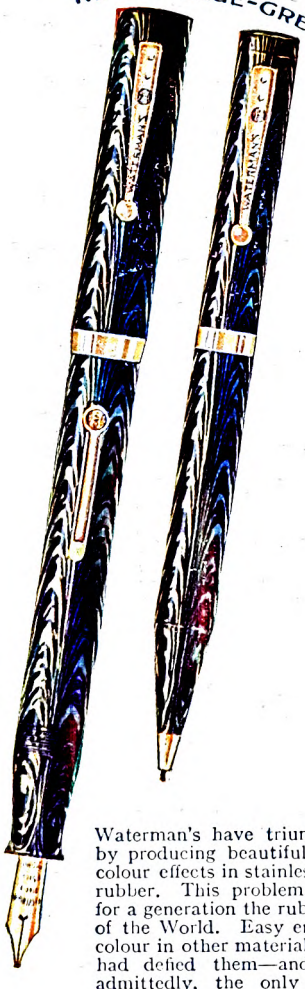

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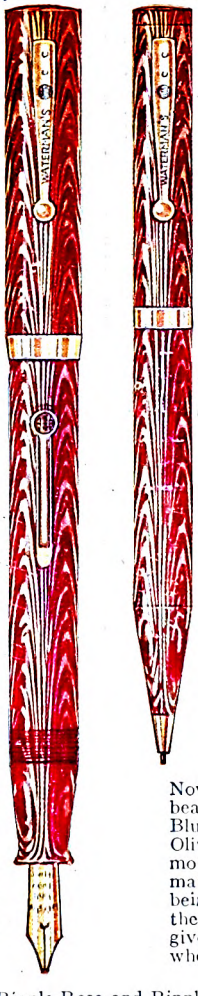

RIPPLE-OLIVE

Waterman's have triumphed again by producing beautiful and lasting colour effects in stainless vulcanised rubber. This problem had baffled for a generation the rubber chemists of the World. Easy enough to get colour in other material, but rubber had defied them—and rubber is, admittedly, the only satisfactory material for fountain pens.

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Pens: No. 92, 25/-; No. 94, 30/-. Pencils: No. 91, 7/6; No. 95, 10/6.

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P. G. WODEHOUSE

THE STRAND MAGAZINE

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ROLAND PERTWEE
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM
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Life is fun — when you're fit

Everything John does is fun to him—he's fit. The secret of his health is Horlick's.

Let Horlick's nourish *you*—make *you* fit and well. Drink a glassful every morning and every night.

Horlick's Malted Milk is obtainable everywhere at 2/-, 3/6, 8/6 and 15/-; also in tablet form in glass pocket flasks. Cafés, restaurants and soda fountains serve Horlick's in many delightful ways—*hot and cold.*

The New HORLICK'S MIXER makes Horlick's delicious. All your kitchen mixing, too, can be better done in this new mixer—nothing can go wrong and nothing could be easier to clean. Price 1/6 everywhere or direct from Horlick's Malted Milk Co., Ltd., Slough, Bucks, with a **FREE SAMPLE OF HORLICK'S MALTED MILK TOFFEE.**

get fit on **HORLICK'S**

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POTTER'S ASTHMA CURE

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MAIDSTONE

Every Piece a Toothsome Gift

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